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THESIS

**CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD
MISSILE DEFENSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR
NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE
FROM THE SEA**

by

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December 1997

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**CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD MISSILE DEFENSE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR NMD FROM THE SEA**

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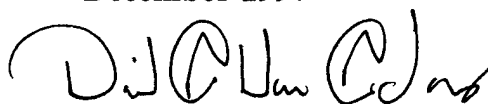
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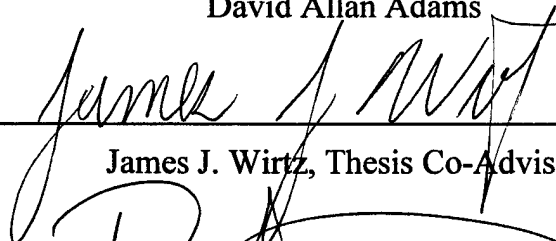
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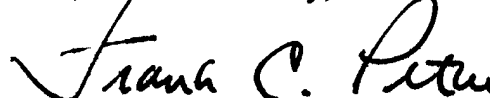
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ABSTRACT

Pursuing a ship-based missile defense capability could thrust the naval service into one of the most heated controversies of the past three decades: the congressional debate over the desirability—or danger—of erecting widespread ballistic missile defenses. To better understand the influences on congressional attitudes, this study examines five divisive congressional debates over missile defense. In contrast to traditional explanations that focus on the causal factors underlying congressional voting behavior, this thesis emphasizes the political process of framing issues to create the political climates that shape congressional attitudes and link them to voting decisions. This thesis shows that major shifts in missile defense policy occur when key individuals successfully manipulate powerful images to legitimize and popularize arguments favoring their desired policy option. Understanding how elites use images to shape political attitudes provides a framework for charting and navigating the congressional storm that is likely to surround the deployment of future Navy missile defense systems.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. STRATEGIC MYTHS AND FRAMING DEFENSE POLICY	1
A. INTRODUCTION	1
B. SHAPING CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES	4
C. THE RELEVANCE OF CONTENDING ARGUMENTS	5
D. STRATEGIC MYTHS AND MISSILE DEFENSES	9
E. MAKING MYTHS AND MAKING NEWS	16
F. SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	20
II. THE GREAT ABM DEBATE	23
A. GENESIS OF THE GREAT ABM DEBATE	24
B. MCNAMARA'S DILEMMA	26
C. NOT IN MY BACKYARD!	31
D. A BARGAINING CHIP	39
E. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND THE GREAT ABM DEBATE	41
III. THE NUCLEAR FREEZE AND SDI	43
A. ORIGINS OF THE FREEZE MOVEMENT	46
B. THE NUCLEAR FREEZE BECOMES A NATIONAL MOVEMENT	51
C. THE ORIGINS OF SDI	53
D. IMPOTENT AND OBSOLETE: REAGAN NEUTRALIZES THE FREEZE	55
E. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND SDI	61
IV. PATRIOT GAMES: GULF WAR LESSONS	65
A. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK: PATRIOT REKINDLES THE SDI DEBATE	68
B. THE REVENGE OF THE NERDS!: SCIENTISTS CHALLENGE PATRIOT	71
C. SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY: DOVES CUT A DEAL	75
D. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND PATRIOT GAMES	77
V. STRATEGIC MYTHS, NAVAL IMAGES, AND NMD FROM THE SEA	79
A. THE NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE CONTROVERSY	80
B. THE MISSING NEXUS: POWERFUL IMAGES & PERCEPTIONS	85
C. THE POLITICS OF NMD FROM THE SEA	88
D. AREAS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH	95
E. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	97
APPENDIX	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	117

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From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds will fall upon men. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin." Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off.

Revelations

I gratefully acknowledge the Program Execution Office Theater Air Defense for providing a grant to conduct this research. My hope is that in some small way this thesis will contribute to the office's efforts to assure that in the midst of a future rain of fire, American sailors will not stand far off, helpless to defend American cities.

My professors at Naval Postgraduate School made this an especially rewarding experience. Jan Breemer inspired me to contemplate the enduring strategic utility of sea power. Bert Patenaude compelled me to examine different perspectives of negotiation, law, and international organizations. Frank Teti taught me to think critically about the national interest. I also appreciate the efforts of Cynthia Levy in opening numerous doors on Capitol Hill and giving me insights on congressional behavior.

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This thesis stresses the importance of beliefs. Throughout my graduate studies I have drawn my strength from an enduring faith in God, family, and country. I thank God, for he deserves credit for any talent I possess or accomplishments I achieve. My wife, Sandy, and our children Kathy Marie, David Junior (DJ), and Zachary Allan are an inspiration. It is their loving encouragement that sustains me and allows my naval career to be truly rewarding. Finally, I would like to express my love for this great nation. Only in America, could a nineteen year old Navy enlistee leave home with fledgling family, and in matter of a few years be given an opportunity to graduate from the Naval Postgraduate School and the honor of serving as an officer on world's greatest submarine warships.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A broad political consensus favoring theater ballistic missile defense has emerged in the wake of the Gulf War. Capitalizing on this consensus, the U.S. Navy is modifying its Aegis ship system to develop a full range of upper and lower-tier theater ballistic missile defense capabilities. Since rapid technical advances are making it difficult to distinguish between theater and strategic missile defense systems, the current political consensus might prove short lived. In fact, many politicians support or oppose theater ballistic missile systems largely because of their hope or fear that these systems will evolve into a politically controversial national missile defense capability. Pursuing a ship-based missile defense capability could thrust the U.S. Navy into one of the most heated defense controversies of the past three decades: the dispute over the desirability—or danger—of erecting widespread ballistic missile defenses.

Missile defenses controversies have become a perennial characteristic of American strategic discourse. Debates over whether missile defenses are destabilizing, inhibit negotiations with the Russians, are necessary to counter missile threats from rogue states, or are technically feasible remain unresolved. Underlying these debates are deeply held convictions, or myths, about how deploying missile defenses might affect American security. These disparate strategic beliefs are reflected in attempts to manipulate political attitudes toward missile defense, and have fueled fluctuations in missile defense policy and funding. To avoid the episodic funding that typically characterizes America missile defense efforts, the naval service must comprehend the framing process that influences congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

A. FRAMING CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES

How do the political actions of influential individuals shape congressional attitudes toward missile defense? Political scientists generally agree that Congress members support initiatives that they perceive to combine good policy and good politics. While this is true, voting decisions are not made in a vacuum. The political climate shapes congressional perceptions of a given policy initiative. This study demonstrates that congressional defense policy making cannot be understood simply by examining the motivations underlying floor votes on defense issues. In contrast to traditional explanations that focus on the causal factors underlying congressional voting behavior, this thesis focuses on how the process of framing political issues influences congressional decision making.

Framing—or myth making—places political incentives in a real context and shapes congressional perceptions of what constitutes sound policy. Elites use a variety of techniques to attract media coverage, interpret events and images, define the terms of the debate, and foster a favorable climate of opinion surrounding their desired policy option. Congress members, in turn, simultaneously take cues from the public and political leaders that influence their attitudes and subsequent voting behavior.

This study examined the role of the framing process in four divisive national debates over missile defense to draw implications for the Navy's role in the current missile defense controversy. In each case examined, myths and images were decisive in perpetuating strategic arguments and shaping congressional attitudes. During "The Great ABM Debate" of the 1960s, elites successfully manipulated the image of a mushroom cloud exploding over America's backyards to create intense public resistance to the Sentinel ABM system. Ten

years later, President Reagan's crusade against the "evil empire" combined with horrific descriptions of a nuclear holocaust gave political life to the nuclear freeze movement and reinforced the desire for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). More recently, images of Patriot missiles during Gulf War became the fulcrum for manipulating public and congressional attitudes on funding missile defense.

Each of these cases illustrates that the success of any missile defense effort depends largely upon the ability of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize their arguments in favor of missile defenses. Today, elite opinion concerning the strategic utility of missile defenses remains polarized. There is a balance of myths. However, key players stand ready to seize the next powerful image to reinforce their strategic arguments and tilt the political balance in favor of their desired missile defense policies.

B. ADVOCATING AEGIS: THE WAY AHEAD!

The Navy has become embroiled in the most recent missile defense controversy. Some national missile defense (NMD) advocates are supporting Navy missile defense programs as a means of "achieving national missile defense through the back door." Thus, sea-based missile defenses have become a cornerstone of the conservative push to defend America from missile attacks. The ABM Treaty and public apathy, however, present major political obstacles to Naval NMD. For this reason, *NMD From the Sea* is an idea whose political moment has not yet arrived. A public desire for NMD, however, may come sooner than anyone thinks. Several alarming international trends—the proliferation of ballistic

missiles, weapons of mass destruction, and the increasing possibility of an accidental launch—could fuel public anxieties and provide the opportunity for missile defense advocates to foster a national consensus favoring withdrawal from the ABM treaty and immediate deployment of an NMD capability. When the political opportunity arises, history has shown that key individuals can manipulate powerful images to shift the climate of public, Presidential, and congressional opinion starkly in favor of national missile defense.

Naval images are likely to play a role in a future effort to create a favorable climate surrounding NMD because sea-based missile defenses have inherent domestic political advantages over other missile defense options. Deploying land-based national missile defenses evokes images of having to fight the war literally “from America’s backyards”; an unsettling idea that generated widespread protest during previous ABM debates. The American people prefer a forward defense that holds threats at arm’s length. They expect the American military to stand in harm’s way as necessary to protect American lives, property, and interests. Bringing the fight home is contrary to the American ethos. Mahan got it right when he wrote, “every danger of a military character to which the United States is exposed is best met outside her territory--at sea.” If the American public becomes anxious about emerging missile threats, then *NMD From the Sea* can provide a culturally consistent answer: allowing Americans to envision a forward missile defense that interdicts the threat “over there” and not over here.

C. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Prematurely pursuing a Naval NMD capability could undermine support for the Aegis program. Continued public apathy on defense issues might allow the President to undermine NMD initiatives with political impunity, regardless of congressional support. Maintaining the shallow political consensus that is currently driving Navy missile defense programs will require the Navy to walk a political tightrope between disparate political factions. Success ultimately might rest on the cautious pursuit of ABM "treaty compliant" Navy theater systems while making closely-held preparations to upgrade those systems to defend American cities should a culmination of events, popular images, and political beliefs compel political leaders to demand such a capability.

Studies are needed to examine the institutional, operational, and programmatic factors that would underlie a Navy NMD effort. Success of Naval NMD will depend upon the infrastructure underlying the Navy theater missile defense program. The Navy must identify a clear path to overcoming institutional, financial, and technological hurdles to Naval NMD. The right people must be positioned to establish clearly definable goals, demand that milestones are reached on time, and ensure that resources are managed properly. Institutional support inside the Navy must be cultivated and the operational implications of this new naval mission must be fully explored.

The importance of naval images should not be underestimated. Naval leaders must think through how the exploitation of naval images might complement or complicate the Navy's

ability to accomplish its missions. Success or failure of a Naval NMD program is likely to depend largely upon the ability of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize their arguments in favor of the Navy's programs. Two sets of images are important. To embrace the Naval NMD solution, the public and elites must first imagine the seriousness of missile problem. Events—such as an Iranian nuclear test, a missile attack on America or our allies, or widespread publicity of Russian command and control problems—might create an opportunity for missile defense advocates to foster a national consensus favoring withdrawal from the ABM treaty and immediate deployment of an NMD capability.

When the nation calls, the Navy could be poised to offer a quick, cost-effective, and culturally consistent, NMD solution. Disseminating images of surface combatants conducting theater missile defense demonstrations and exercises could pave the way for public support of Naval NMD. Properly presented, the *NMD From the Sea* concept could help alleviate public fears of foreign missiles by establishing a forward defense of the homeland while serving America's mission to provide an extended defense that promotes world stability. Naval NMD is a natural defense of the United States. Just as Aegis was the mythological shield that protected Zeus from deadly threats, when the missile threat becomes apparent to the American people—the image of Aegis ships standing in harm's way to shield American cities might be an important factor in shaping future congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

I. STRATEGIC MYTHS AND FRAMING DEFENSE POLICY

A. INTRODUCTION

A broad political consensus favoring theater ballistic missile defenses has emerged in the wake of the Gulf War. Capitalizing on this consensus, the U.S. Navy is modifying its Aegis ship system to develop a full range of upper and lower-tier theater ballistic missile defense capabilities. Since rapid technical advances are making it difficult to distinguish between theater and strategic missile defense systems, the current political consensus might prove short lived. In fact, many politicians support or oppose theater ballistic missile systems largely because of their hope or fear that these systems will evolve into a politically controversial national missile defense capability. Pursuing a ship-based missile defense capability could thrust the U.S. Navy into one of the most heated defense controversies of the past three decades: the dispute over the desirability—or danger—of erecting widespread ballistic missile defenses.

Missile defense controversies have become a perennial characteristic of American strategic discourse. Debates over whether missile defenses are destabilizing, inhibit negotiations with the Russians, are necessary to counter missile threats from rogue states, or are technically feasible remain unresolved. Underlying the debates are deeply held convictions, or myths, about how deploying missile defenses might affect American security. These disparate beliefs were reflected in attempts to manipulate the broader range of political attitudes toward missile defense and have fueled fluctuations in missile defense policy and funding. To avoid the episodic funding that has typically characterized America missile defense efforts, the naval service must comprehend the framing process that influences congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

How do the political actions of influential individuals shape congressional attitudes toward missile defense? Traditional explanations of congressional behavior focus on the political incentives that drive congressional voting behavior. Political scientists generally agree that Congress members support initiatives that they perceive to combine good policy and good politics. While this is true, widely ignored is the political process that places political incentives in a real context and shapes congressional perceptions of a given policy initiative. In contrast to traditional explanations that focus on the causal factors underlying congressional voting behavior, this thesis focuses on how the process of framing political issues influences congressional decision making.

Framing constitutes a strategy through which key political elites attempt to convince the public and fellow elites of the validity of their beliefs and supporting policy imperatives.¹ Elites use a variety of techniques to attract media coverage, interpret events and images, define the terms of the debate, and foster a favorable climate of opinion surrounding their desired policy option. Shaping the climate of opinion influences congressional perceptions of what constitutes sound policy.

Framing is important to any political debate, but in areas of intense strategic uncertainty, like nuclear weapons and missile defense, efforts to frame congressional attitudes become even more salient. With the prospect of nuclear Armageddon held in the balance and a lack of any concrete evidence to support their beliefs, key players in the anti-ballistic missile (ABM) debate consistently manipulate powerful images to perpetuate their

¹ Randal B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay, "How Congress Influences Foreign and Defense Policy," in *Congress Resurgent* ed. Randal B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 32-35.

strategic arguments. For example, elites successfully manipulated the image of a mushroom cloud exploding over America's backyards to create intense public resistance to the Sentinel ABM system during "the Great ABM Debate" of the 1960s. Ten years later, President Reagan's crusade against the "evil empire" combined with several horrific literary descriptions of a nuclear holocaust gave political life to the nuclear freeze movement and reinforced the desire for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). More recently, the images of the Patriot missile during Gulf War became the fulcrum for manipulating public and congressional attitudes toward increased missile defenses funding.

This thesis uses interviews with key individuals, recently unclassified documents, and secondary sources to show how each of these cases highlights the significance of personalities, beliefs, and images to the missile defense debate. It identifies a framework for charting the political storm that is likely to surround the development of future missile defense systems. Success of missile defense efforts depend largely upon the ability of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize their arguments in favor of missile defenses. Understanding the framing of congressional attitudes is important when considering the pursuit of a *National Missile Defense (NMD) From the Sea* capability. I argue that maintaining the shallow political consensus favoring Navy missile defense programs will require the Navy to walk a political tightrope between disparate political factions. Success might ultimately rest on the cautious pursuit of ABM "treaty compliant" Navy theater systems while making closely-held preparations to upgrade those systems to defend American cities should a culmination of events, popular images, and political beliefs compel political leaders to demand such a capability.

This chapter introduces a theoretical framework for understanding the shaping of congressional attitudes. Section B introduces a new theory of congressional behavior that focuses on the process of framing political attitudes. Section C explores the relevance of the contending deferential, parochial, policy theories of congressional behavior. Section D identifies and defines the strategic myths surrounding missile defenses. Section E details the role of elites and images in the process of framing strategic arguments. Section F outlines the scope and organization of the study.

B. SHAPING CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES

The academic literature provides three distinct “conceptual lenses” to view congressional behavior on defense issues.² Political scientists argue that Congress members either (1) *defer* to the executive branch on defense issues, playing only a minor role the weapons acquisition process, (2) evaluate defense programs only with respect to *parochial* economic and social interests, or (3) promote their conception of good defense *policy* within the constraints placed on them by their constituents.³ Each of these arguments offers valuable insight into congressional voting behavior. However, each argument fails to capture the significance of individual personalities and political maneuvering in setting the defense policy agenda, framing the important issues, and shaping congressional attitudes.

² The term *conceptual lenses* is from Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), v. For a concise description of the three *conceptual lenses* to view congressional behavior on defense policy see James M. Lindsay, *Congress and Nuclear Weapons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 7-22.

³ Lindsay, *Congress and Nuclear Weapons*, 7-22.

To better understand the congressional role in formulation of defense policy a fourth approach that emphasizes the relationship between political elites, strategic beliefs, and popular images is needed. My argument is that major shifts in defense policy occur when key individuals—whom I refer to as myth makers⁴—successfully manipulate powerful images to perpetuate their beliefs and shift the balance of public and elite opinion in favor of their desired policies.

Traditional explanations explore the causal factors underlying congressional attitudes as reflected in voting behavior. In contrast, my approach emphasizes the political processes that frame issues and create the political climates that shape congressional attitudes and link causal factors to congressional voting decisions. Understanding the relationship between political elites, strategic beliefs, and popular images to the making of defense policy is not intended to replace deferential, parochial, or policy lenses; instead, it provides a framework for explaining how each is relevant to the framing of congressional attitudes.

C. THE RELEVANCE OF CONTENDING ARGUMENTS

1. The Deferential Lens

The *deferential lens* emphasizes congressional acquiescence to the executive branch on strategic issues.⁵ This approach seemed to be particularly relevant prior to the late 1960s;

⁴ For a complete discussion of the central role myth makers can play in the weapons acquisition process see Peter R. Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb? India and Nuclear Weapons, 1947-1974*, PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997; see also Peter R. Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Proliferation," *Security Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1990): 206.

⁵ For example, see Barbara Hinckley, *Less Than Meets the Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

the subsequent hotly contested policy debates over missile defense and other weapons systems suggest that deferential theories of congressional behavior have diminished utility.⁶ Today, members of Congress regularly and publicly challenge the President on defense issues.⁷ Recent studies suggest that Congress members rarely defer to the President's authority on military acquisitions unless they agree or are indifferent toward his policy or they believe opposition would unjustifiably impair the President's ability to conduct foreign affairs.⁸ Moreover, to suggest that Congress simply submits to executive authority misses an important point. By virtue of his position, the President is potentially the nation's most powerful myth maker. Exploiting the bully pulpit and his foreign policy responsibilities, the President can frame the terms of the defense debate to shift public and congressional opinion in his direction. Thus, a combination of deference and Presidential influence can ensure executive dominance of defense issues.

The President, however, is still constrained by popular perceptions that often lie beyond his control. If the President's defense policies are inconsistent with those perceptions, he will leave an opening for other political elites to act. For example, the Bush administration was slow to reshape its defense expenditures after the fall of the Berlin Wall and impending collapse of the Soviet Union. This allowed congressional elites—namely

⁶ Edward C. Lawrence, "The Changing Role of Congress in Defense Policy-Making," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 20 (June 1976): 213-253.

⁷ Randal B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay, "Foreign and Defense Policy in Congress: An Overview," in *Congress Resurgent* eds. Randal B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 11.

⁸ James M. Lindsay, "Congress and the Defense Budget: Parochialism of Policy," in *Arms, Politics, and the Economy: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Roger Higgs (New York: Holmes and Meyer, 1990), 178-197.

Senator Sam Nunn and Congressman Les Aspin—to seize the initiative, manipulate the images of Cold War collapse, and shift the balance of congressional opinion in favor of their own defense initiatives.⁹

2. The Parochial Lens

Pork barreling—a Congress member's predisposition to support programs based on local economic incentives—is widely accepted as the primary motive for congressional voting behavior on defense issues.¹⁰ The *parochial lens* has powerful intuitive appeal. Most voting studies, however, suggest that constituency benefits have little influence on how members vote.¹¹ One striking example is a study that shows that congressional Doves voted thirty-four to six against SDI funding, despite the fact that their districts each hosted a major SDI contractor.¹² These studies show that ideological beliefs—not parochial interests—are the best predictor of how members vote on strategic issues.

Arguments discounting the parochial lens often ignore the most important parochial imperative: public opinion.¹³ The direction and intensity of public attitudes are undoubtedly

⁹ See Paul Stockton, "Beyond Micromanagement: Congressional Budgeting for a Post-Cold War Military," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (1995): 233-259.

¹⁰ Richard Fitzgerald and Gerald Lipson, *Pork Barrel: The Unexpurgated Grace Commission Story of Profligacy* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1994).

¹¹ For a bibliography of these works see Lindsay, "Parochialism or Policy?" 197.

¹² Lindsay, *Congress and Nuclear Weapons*, 110.

¹³ Larry M. Bartels, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Build Up," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 2 (June 1992): 457-473.

the most powerful impetus for congressional action.¹⁴ Congress members ultimately rely on active local constituencies to support their reelection. Despite the existence of a local defense contractor, a representative's vocal, supportive constituency may oppose a particular defense policy.¹⁵ Furthermore, members instinctively respond to perceived shifts in public attitudes.¹⁶ Factors driving changes in public opinion can also stimulate changes in congressional attitudes for both substantive and political reasons.¹⁷ Sociologists suggest that in the process of making decisions Congress members simultaneously take cues from the public and political leaders that shape their opinions and subsequent voting behavior.¹⁸

3. The Policy Lens

Some congressional theorists argue "that members of Congress pursue their conceptions of good public policy subject to constituency constraints."¹⁹ Policy lens protagonists argue that people run for elected office seeking the power to advance their ideas of good public policy. Continued policy influence, however, depends upon reelection.

¹⁴ Roger H. Davidson, "Congress and the American People," in *Congressional Politics*, ed. Christopher J. Deering (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 308.

¹⁵ For an explanation of supportive constituencies see Eileen Burgin, "The Influence of Constituents: Congressional Decision Making on Issues of foreign Policy and Defense," in *Congress Resurgent*, 67-88.

¹⁶ Bartels, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making," 457-473.

¹⁷ The difference between political and policy preferences is very hard to distinguish but the fact that congress is responsive to the intensity of public opinion seems irrefutable.

¹⁸ Donald R. Matthews and James A. Stimson, *Yeas and Nays: Normal Decision-Making in the U.S. House of Representatives* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).

¹⁹ Lindsay, *Congress and Nuclear Weapons*, 137.

Making good policy and getting reelected are not necessarily mutually exclusive goals. In fact, if a member's "substantive actions appear 'responsible' and 'statesmenlike' to constituents; this is good electoral politics."²⁰

John Kingdon writes that it is "hard to account for the observed voting behavior [in Congress] with out invoking some version of legislators' ideology or conception of good public policy as a major part of the explanation."²¹ Supporters of the policy lens assert that members have wide policy latitude within the boundaries of (what they judge to be) constituent constraints.²² But constituent opinion becomes increasingly influential in shaping congressional attitudes as issues become more salient.²³ Any coherent theory of congressional behavior cannot escape the centrality of political beliefs in the making of public policy. However, the policy lense has limited utility in the absence of an estimate of how various factors and political processes—such as constituent opinion and myth making—interrelate to shape a member's conception of public policy.

D. STRATEGIC MYTHS AND MISSILE DEFENSES

Congressional attitudes are invariably influenced by some combination of deferential, parochial, and policy imperatives. Framing—or myth making—is the process that ties these

²⁰ Jonathon E. Medalia, "Congress and Political Guidance of Weapons Procurement," *Naval War College Review* 28 (Fall 1975): 20-21.

²¹ John W. Kingdon, "Ideas, Politics, and Public Policies," paper presented at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 6.

²² Lindsay, *Congress and Nuclear Weapons*, 137.

²³ John W. Kingdon, *Congressional Voting Decisions*, 3rd. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 43-45.

factors together. The President and other influential elites create or interpret powerful public images to perpetuate strategic myths to influence constituent and congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

Peter R. Lavoy uses the term *nuclear myth* to denote “an unverifiable belief about the relationship between a state’s nuclear weapons policy and its national security, prestige, or power.”²⁴ This contrasts with the popular conception of myths as “fictitious stories,”²⁵ and with Jack Synder’s description of myths as a specific set of incorrect strategic concepts.²⁶ Lavoy points out that the absence of a scientific method underpinning nuclear strategy suggests that the strategic and political consequences of nuclear weapons acquisition “can be believed but not reliably known.”²⁷ The factual or fictitious nature of nuclear beliefs is generally indeterminate and somewhat irrelevant to the nuclear weapons decision-making process. The outcome of a nuclear weapons policy debate ultimately depends “upon the ability of a myth maker to legitimize and popularize his or her beliefs among fellow elites and then persuade national leaders to act on these views.”²⁸

²⁴ See Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb?*, 45.

²⁵ The definition of myths as “fictitious stories” is the third dictionary description. Lavoy’s argument is to meant to convey an adaption of the first definition of myths as “a traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites (beliefs) of a people.” See *Webster’s New World Dictionary Third College Addition* (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan Co., 1994), 898. Similarly, it follows that in the context of this discussion myths are stories that convey unscientific accounts, theories, and beliefs to explain the relationship between arms and security.

²⁶ Jack Synder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

²⁷ Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb?*, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

Lavoy's emphasis on the unscientific nature of nuclear myths and central role of nuclear myth makers has greatly increased our understanding of nuclear weapons acquisition decisions. The logic and relevance of his argument, however, goes well beyond nuclear weapons. I argue that the decision to develop any new weapons systems—not just nuclear weapons—is always ultimately based on political, rather than scientific or mathematical calculations. For the purpose of this study, therefore, myths are defined more broadly as *unverified beliefs concerning the relationship between a state's military policies and its national security, prestige, and power.*

The uncertain relationship between arms and national security is a constant of modern history and a persistent topic of American political discourse. For example, during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 an intense debate ensued over the necessity to provide congress the authority “to provide and maintain a Navy.”²⁹ Anti-federalists argued that building a fleet would “incite the nations of Europe against us...to crush us in our infancy.”³⁰ Federalists—following the lead of Alexander Hamilton—countered that a strong navy was essential if the United States expected to remain neutral in wars between Great Britain and France. Moreover, Hamilton insisted that a navy would assure “national respectability ...allowing the United States to become the arbiter of Europe and America.”³¹

The fate of the Navy—and the fledgling nation's defense—rested on the persuasiveness of Hamilton and other key delegates in advancing their ideas about the

²⁹ See Kenneth J. Hagan, *The People's Navy* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 24-26.

³⁰ Ibid, 24.

³¹ Ibid, 26.

relationship between weapons, security, and prestige. Each side presented anecdotal evidence to reinforce its beliefs. None of these beliefs, however, could be proven. But the federalists were able to shift the balance of public and delegate opinion in favor of a Navy by propagating persuasive personal arguments in the media—as embodied by the Federalist Papers.³²

The inherent uncertainties of how military policies influence a nation's security, power, and prestige suggest that myths and myth making are key factors in shaping attitudes toward any defense policy. In matters of nuclear strategy the phenomenon is exacerbated. The high stakes of nuclear Armageddon combined with the inability to verify the international consequences of employing various strategic systems generates intensely held personal beliefs and forces those beliefs into the realm of theology.³³

Scholars identify several reasons why American strategic beliefs are intensely mythical. Ages of religious teachings have imbued society with myths concerning its ultimate destruction. Popular nuclear science and nostalgia provide a realistic mechanism for imagining the apocalypse and fosters an inescapable shadow of nuclear anxiety to loom over the American psyche.³⁴ The imprecise strategic implications of the nuclear revolution also mean that decision makers must rely on tenuous theoretical assumptions to imagine how

³² Hagan, *The People's Navy*, 26.

³³ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospects for Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

³⁴ This point is made nicely by Spencer Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); and more recently by David L. Williams, *Nuclear Myths and Social Discourse: The U.S. Decision to Pursue Nuclear Weapons*, Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 1996.

nuclear weapons policies might influence international political outcomes.³⁵ A fortunate lack of experience with nuclear confrontation, however, leaves various strategic beliefs untested and essentially untestable.³⁶ These troubling unknowns evoke a typical human psychological reaction; an almost religious faith in one's beliefs provides the explanatory context for coping with otherwise mentally unsettling issues.

Myths are the cognitive context in which strategic debates are conducted. Thus, any position on missile defenses is based on a set of strategic tenets. Beliefs about national missile defenses that are specifically designed to counter long-range missiles carrying nuclear warheads rest almost exclusively in the realm of strategic theology. However, there are contradicting claims about their strategic relevance of theater missile defenses. For example, the prevailing—yet far from unanimous—myth today is that deploying theater missile defenses would have little impact on the strategic nuclear equation.³⁷ But, a sizable minority of influential political elites contend that theater defenses—Navy systems in particular—could endanger American security by undermining the ABM Treaty and

³⁵ See Phil E. Tetlock, "Psychological Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence," *American Review of Psychology* 42 (1991): 239-176; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Nuclear Learning and U.S.-Soviet Security Regimes," *International Organizations* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 371-402; and Peter R. Lavoy, "The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 4, no.4 (Summer 1995): 695-753.

³⁶ For a thorough discussion of the spectrum of "untestable beliefs" held by key players in the strategic nuclear debate see Robert A. Levine, *Still The Arms Debate* (Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing Co., 1990), 117-203; see also Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospects for Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); David Goldfischer, *The Best Defense* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 13-50; and Jack N. Barkenbus and Alvin M. Wienberg, eds., *Stability and Strategic Defenses* (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute Press, 1989).

³⁷ Over the past six years TMD programs have passed Congress with little opposition. William J. Perry, "Protecting the Nation Through Missile Defense," *Defense Issues* 11, no. 37, 1. Secretary Perry points out that "Congress fully supports our defense against this threat (theater ballistic missile)."

upsetting strategic stability.³⁸ These contradictory beliefs are integral to any theater ballistic missile defense (TBMD) debate.

Congressional attitudes toward missile defense reflect the strategic myths—the unverified beliefs about the relationship between weapons of mass destruction, missile defenses, and security—that surround the missile defenses debate. Although attitudes towards missile defense encompass a wide spectrum of ideas, they can be grouped into three categories: Hawks, Doves, and Owls.³⁹ Strategic *Hawks* are individuals who believe that missile defenses increase security by reducing the vulnerability of both the strategic arsenal and the American public. Strategic *Doves* are people who believe that deployment of strategic defenses is destabilizing and would unnecessarily escalate the nuclear arms race bringing the nation closer to the brink of nuclear war. Strategic *Owls*, or moderates, are individuals who only favor missile defense for limited protection or in an overall deterrent-stabilizing context. See the Appendix for a more detailed description of these congressional attitudes.

Two sets of beliefs influence the outcome of congressional debates over missile defense. The first set of beliefs discussed above and described in the Appendix section concern the desirability—or danger—of deploying missile defenses. The second set of beliefs are assertions concerning the technical, economic, and political feasibility of constructing missile defense systems. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the important

³⁸ For an example of the persistent argument against both theater and national missile defense see Lauren Spain, "The Dream of Missile Defense. So Where's the Peace Dividend?," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 51, no. 5 (September 1995): 49-50.

³⁹ These categories are adaptation of the categories described by Graham T. Allison, Albert Carnesale, and Joseph Nye, Jr., *Hawks, Doves, and Owls* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

strategic myths and Table 1.2 lists the auxiliary assertions prevalent in the missile defense debate. The efforts of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize these beliefs and assertions is central to success or failure of any missile defense initiative.

Table 1.1 Categories of Beliefs Concerning Missile Defense

Belief Type	Subject of Belief with Respect to Missile Defense
Strategic Myths	
Superiority (Hawks)	Missile defenses enhance security by reducing the vulnerability of the strategic arsenal, conventional forces, and the public.
Stability (Doves)	Missile defense only enhance security if kept in an overall deterrence-stabilizing context.
Elimination (Owls)	Missile defense erode security by promoting increased nuclear competition, increasing spiral of tension, and bringing nations closer to brink of nuclear extinction.

Table 1.2 Auxiliary Assertions Missile Defense⁴⁰

Belief Type	Auxiliary Assertions Concerning Missile Defense
Auxiliary Assertions	
Technical feasibility	Capacity to overcome technical difficulties associated with developing missile defense; possibility for industrial spin-offs.
Economic feasibility	Capacity to meet financial costs associated with developing missile defenses; possibility of lucrative industrial spin-offs.
Political feasibility	Capacity to manage political problems associated with developing missile defenses; impact on relations with other state's—particularly the Soviet Union in the context of the 1972 ABM Treaty.

⁴⁰ Auxiliary assertions concerning missile defenses are interestingly identical to those concerning nuclear weapons. See Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb*, 92.

E. MAKING MYTHS AND MAKING NEWS

Strategic myths are held and advanced by individuals. Congressional attitudes toward missile defense are shaped by key players: the President and other executive officials, congressional defense policy elites, and leaders of interest groups including both public and corporate interest lobbies. Fostering support for their defense policy preferences requires these political elites to frame issues in manner that creates a favorable climate of political opinion toward their preferred policies.

Defense policy shifts reflect changes in the level and intensity of public opinion.⁴¹ Roger Davidson explains that “public attitudes—not only their direction, but also their intensity—are undoubtably the most powerful engines propelling congressional action on legislative issues.”⁴² It is a mistake, however, to believe that democratic governments respond to the public’s whims. On the contrary, Murray Edelman notes in *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* notes that the public does not analyze and study detailed information concerning security issues but it “ignores these things until political actions and speeches make them symbolically threatening or reassuring, and it then responds to the cues furnished by the actions and speeches, not to directly knowledge of the facts.”⁴³ It is political action that shapes popular and elite opinion, not the other way around. Therefore, myth makers can—and do—manipulate public and elite opinion to influence defense policy outcomes.

⁴¹ Bartels, “Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making,” 457-473.

⁴² Roger H. Davidson, “Congress and the American People,” in *Congressional Politics*, ed. Christopher J. Deering (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 308.

⁴³ Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 172.

To frame public policy, elites must exploit the dynamic relationship between the media, the public, and Congress. The media is the lens through which elites communicate with the public and each other. As one prominent political consultant recently noted, "if it is not on television, it hardly matters."⁴⁴ A democratic free press creates a critical nexus between myth makers and the media. To maintain "objectivity" current journalistic practice requires news organizations to feature expert authorities and compels reporters to search for the "the ultimate spokesman" on any newsworthy topic.⁴⁵ Competent myth makers are always positioned to be considered policy experts. These entrepreneurial politicians stand ready to seize any window of opportunity to perpetuate their beliefs by interpreting the images and events surrounding a given policy initiative.

Myth making requires both a good sense of timing and a creative knack for framing issues and events to generate favorable news coverage. Issues most likely to resonate are easily described, have clearly defined sides, affect a large part of the public, and come with compelling images. Sometimes great political leaders can arouse political consciousness with speeches that generate vivid, emotion laden images. For example, Winston Churchill's "iron curtain" is notable because it galvanized America's opposition to the emerging Soviet threat. More often, a culmination of real world conditions and events will propel certain issues into the media spotlight. Interpreting the associated images provides myth makers with a powerful means of telling a story in a way that words alone cannot.

⁴⁴ Roger Ailes, *Bare Knuckles and Backroom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 374.

⁴⁵ Susan H. Miller, "News Coverage of Congress: The Search for the Ultimate Spokesman," *Journalistic Quarterly* 54 (Autumn 1977), 459-465.

Images seem more convincing than words because people tend to believe what they see.⁴⁶ But despite claims to the contrary, media images rarely speak for themselves.⁴⁷ Images and events must be placed in the context of a larger story that explains associated causes, effects, and relevance. Thus, the credible new frame comes with descriptive dialogue that sets the scene, characterizes the actors, explains the plots and subplots, actively moves the story to a climax and, most important, ends with a host of official experts that provide the final, authoritative interpretation of the events.⁴⁸ Positioned as authoritative experts, myth makers can interpret images and events in ways that identify their pet policy preferences as attractive solutions.⁴⁹

Not just any interpretation of images and events can become credible.⁵⁰ As John Kingdon points out "when a window opens because a policy is pressing, the alternatives generated as solutions to the problem fare better if they also meet the test of political

⁴⁶ Stephen Baker, *Visual Persuasion* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961).

⁴⁷ Charles Elder and Roger Cobb make this point forcefully: "Events and circumstances do not speak for themselves. Whether they constitute a policy problem, or a particularly urgent one, depends on the meaning attributed to them." Charles D. Elder and Roger W. Cobb, *The Political Uses of Symbols* (New York: Longman, 1983), 24.

⁴⁸ For a complete description of the credible new frame see Philo C. Washburn, *Broadcasting Propaganda: International Radio Broadcasts and the Social Construction of Reality* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992).

⁴⁹ Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb*, 96.

⁵⁰ The discussion of myth making begs the larger question "What factors make certain media images more believable than others." Social construction and media dependency theory address this question. For the classic explanation of social construction theory see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). The literature on media dependency theory includes Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane, "Media and the Social Construction of Reality: Toward an Integration of Theory and Research," *Communications Research* 11 (1984): 323-40; and Dan Nimmo and James Combs, *Mediated Political Realities* (New York: Longman, 1990).

acceptability.”⁵¹ Political acceptability is function of the credibility of both the message and the persuasiveness of the messenger.⁵² To become accepted, a myth must be consistent with a pre-existing political culture.⁵³ For example, calls for unilateral disarmament and the Strategic Defense Initiative were both simplistic solutions to the nuclear paradox. Reagan’s strategic vision was believable—at least temporarily—because of his personal aura and the cultural consistency of the Strategic Defense Initiative; SDI tapped into America’s deeply held anti-communist and technological heritage by compelling the public and political elites to imagine defeating the “evil empire” with American gadgetry that would “render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”⁵⁴

The success of one myth over another depends upon three sets of factors: (1) the substantive content of the myth and its ability to be placed into a culturally consistent context; (2) the political credibility and position of the individual myth makers; and (3) the ability of myth makers to create or interpret media images that serve to legitimize and popularize their strategic beliefs, increase the level or intensity of favorable public and elite

⁵¹ John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984), 183.

⁵² See Richard M. Perloff, *The Dynamics of Persuasion* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993); Anthony R. Patkanis and Eliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda: Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1992); and Robert B. Cialdina, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1993).

⁵³ Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb*, 48.

⁵⁴ For a description of President Reagan’s rhetorical impact on the arms debate see Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Eagle Resurgent? The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987). For a complete discussion of the role of myth making in the early eighties debates over SDI and Nuclear Freeze see Chapter III.

opinion regarding their initiatives, and thereby shape important political attitudes.⁵⁵ This study examines the role of these factors in shaping congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

F. SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The political story of American missile defense efforts unfolds chronologically. Using the analytical framework described in the previous sections, this study examines four divisive national debates over missile defense funding. Each chapter describes the missile defense debate by highlighting the factors influencing the political environment surrounding the debate. It outlines the position and beliefs of key individuals engaged in each stage of the debate and describes efforts to manipulate powerful images to propagate their strategic arguments. Finally, each chapter analyzes the success or failure of elites in framing the terms of the debate to shape congressional attitudes toward their preferred policies.

Chapter II explores the "The Great ABM Debate" which occurred between 1967-1970. It identifies the political forces that lead to the genesis of congressional assertiveness on defense issues reflected in congressional opposition to the deployment of the Sentinel ABM system. It explores the motivations underlying Secretary McNamara's announcement to deploy the Sentinel ABM system and describes how key players manipulated powerful images to turn public and congressional attitudes against the Sentinel initiative, forcing the administration to abandon Sentinel—a multi-site ABM program—in favor of Safeguard a very limited single site missile defense system.

⁵⁵ See Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb?*, 76.

Chapter III examines the individuals and images that drove the nuclear freeze movement of the early 1980s. The chapter explains how President Reagan—the most powerful myth maker of his day—recognized the freeze movement as a serious challenge to his overall strategic efforts and executed a deliberate political strategy to undermine the initiative. Manipulating the same images of nuclear devastation as did the nuclear freeze movement, Reagan offered an even more politically salient approach to the nuclear problem: The Strategic Defense Initiative. The political maneuvering surrounding SDI and the nuclear freeze movement is a compelling example of how strategic myth making can frame congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

Chapter IV examines the Patriot experience of the Gulf War. The debate over Patriot's performance in Gulf was not grounded in concerns about the effectiveness or necessity of theater missile defenses in the post-Cold War international environment. Instead, the argument was quickly framed in terms of the competing Cold War paradigms. Patriot's political story is one full of savvy, irony, and manipulation. Despite considerable evidence that its success was vastly oversold, Patriot's persona captured the American imagination, empowered political elites, and dramatically influenced both the nature and level of missile defense funding in the nineties. The Patriot debate illustrates that strategic myths and popular images are still central to any debate over missile defenses.

Chapter V points to the implications of previous debates for future ABM controversies. It outlines the political dynamics of the 1995 national missile defense (NMD) controversy, explaining the factors that allowed the President to undermine the latest Republican NMD proposal. The chapter explores congressional motives for bolstering Navy

missile defense funding and examines how congressional framing might complicate or complement future Navy missile defense efforts. It ends by providing a framework for charting the political storm that is likely to surround *NMD From the Sea*.

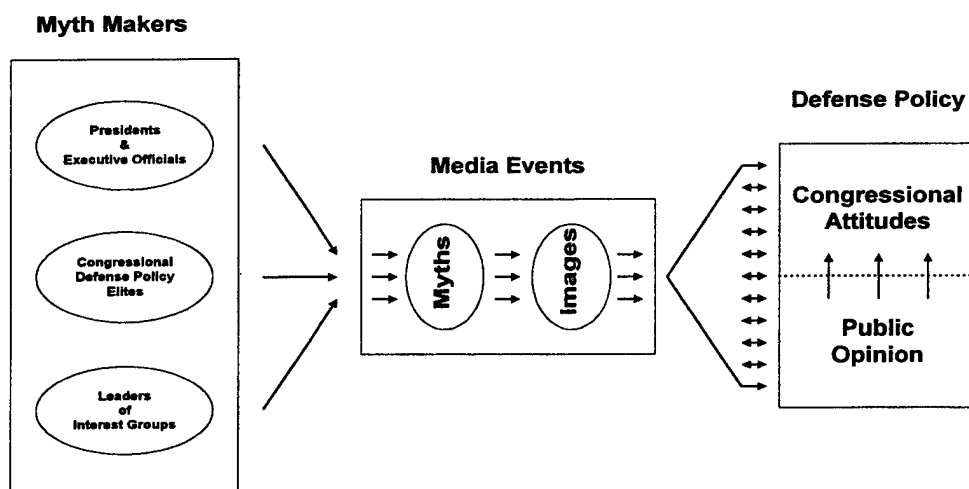


Figure 1.1 Summary of General Argument

Figure 1.1 outlines my approach to examining the influences on congressional attitudes toward defense issues. Congressional deference, parochialism, and policy preferences all matter in determining the direction and scope of United States defense efforts. However, understanding the precise role of each of these lenses plays in the formulation of specific defense policies is a separate challenge that scholars have not been able to address completely. By examining the history of the congressional debate of missile defenses, this study emphasizes how defense policy elites (myth makers) have consistently attempted to manipulate powerful images, perpetuate their strategic beliefs (myths), shape congressional attitudes toward missile defense, and shift the balance of congressional opinion in favor of their desired policy options.

II. THE GREAT ABM DEBATE

On 28 December 1995, President Clinton vetoed a 265 billion dollar defense authorization bill citing his strong objection to provisions mandating deployment by the year 2003 of a National Missile Defense (NMD) system capable of defending all fifty states.⁵⁶ Twenty-five years after the end of what was known as "the Great ABM Debate," the dispute over the deploying ballistic missile defense systems has become a perennial issue of American strategic discourse. The tangled web of political interests that embody the anti-ballistic missile (ABM) debate was first spun in the congressional-executive battles of the late 1960s. Discerning the future of missile defense must begin with an effort to untangle that web and explore the issues that fueled the initial ABM debate.

In studying the 1995 NMD controversy, there are eerie echos of a previous debate. Twenty-five years earlier, opponents squared off over viability and necessity of missile defenses. Politicians debated whether missile defenses were destabilizing, inhibited negotiations with the Soviets, were necessary to counter the Chinese missile threat, and were technically feasible. These arguments were never resolved, nor are they likely to be now. Disagreements in Congress or between Congress and the Executive are rarely precise nor are the results explicit.⁵⁷ However, the convergence of forces that culminated in the Great ABM Debate shattered the Cold War consensus on strategic issues and altered the relationship

⁵⁶ Brian Green, "The Clash on National Missile Defense," *Air Force Magazine* (March 1996): 8.

⁵⁷ John W. Finney, "A Historical Perspective," in Walter Stutzle, Bhupendra Jasani, and Regina Cohen, ed., *The ABM Debate: To Defend or Not to Defend?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29.

between the Congress and the Executive concerning defense policy. The implications of that change include the emergence of congressional assertiveness on defense issues and the polarization of conflicting unverified strategic beliefs among foreign policy elites that still exists today.

This chapter emphasizes that myths and myth making were integral to that first ABM debate. Section A describes the political environment that fueled the genesis of the Great ABM Debate. Section B points out the importance of political images in the Secretary McNamara's announcement of the decision to deploy the Sentinel ABM systems in September of 1967. Section C explains how the political actions of a few key individuals mobilized public opposition and altered the climate of opinion surrounding the ABM debate. Section D highlights how the President used his position to perpetuate the myth that missile defense was a critical bargaining chip in negotiating with the Soviets.

A. GENESIS OF THE GREAT ABM DEBATE

During the first twenty years of the Cold War, the U.S. Congress anxiously reinforced the programs and policies of the Executive on national security matters, particularly with regard to nuclear strategy and arms control.⁵⁸ The dangers of the Cold War prompted Congress to forego its oversight responsibilities on most defense issues. Although different schools of thought on arms control policy were reaching maturity, these differences did not emerge in the public policy debate until the middle of the 1960s.

⁵⁸ Howard Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy Making and the Arms Control Community* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Int., 1980), 1.

The Vietnam War profoundly changed the congressional role in national security policy.⁵⁹ The war in Southeast Asia polarized the nation, increased the public awareness of defense policy, and ended an era of relatively unquestioned congressional support for the policies of the executive branch.

Issues once considered too sensitive for public consumption and debate moved rapidly into the political arena. Persuasive politicians began to openly challenge the President on defense issues and turned to think tanks, universities, scientists, and arms control movements to help reinforce and perpetuate their strategic arguments.

The Great ABM Debate represented the first manifestation of this changing political environment. The President's decision to build and deploy an ABM System in the late 1960's was met by staunch, open opposition by some members of Congress such as Senator Albert Gore, Sr. For three years from 1967 to 1970, Gore led a group of daring senators in mounting an unprecedented challenge to a new weapons system. Supported by an increasingly influential group of eminent scientists, civilian military experts, and public interest lobbies who doubted the viability of the system and warned of its dangerous effect on U.S.-Soviet relations, the senators contested every vote on the ABM issue. Despite the fact that the system was pushed by influential members of Congress, requested by the President, and heavily endorsed by the military, the senators almost won. Some argue they did win because the United States has never fully deployed an anti-ballistic missile system.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Robert A. Levine, *Still The Arms Debate* (Brookfield, Vt.: Dartmouth Publishing Co., 1990), 113.

⁶⁰ Finney, "A Historical Perspective," 29.

On the surface, the Great ABM Debate, like all political controversies, was fought over philosophical differences about what constituted sound strategic policy for the United States. Just beneath the surface, however, domestic political pressures fueled the controversy. In the end, substantive policy arguments proved only as important as the ability of key political elites to manipulate powerful images to reinforce their arguments, change the climate of opinion, and alter political attitudes toward missile defense.

B. MCNAMARA'S DILEMMA

The ABM debate burst into the open on 18 September 1967, when Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara announced the President's decision to deploy the Sentinel ABM system in a speech titled "The Dynamics of Nuclear Strategy."⁶¹ For years McNamara had argued that deploying an ABM system would be "wasteful and ineffective."⁶² Most of the speech reinforced this theme, emphasizing the dangers of deploying defenses:

Any present or foreseeable ABM system can rather obviously be defeated by an enemy simply sending more offensive warheads, or dummy warheads, than there are defensive missile capable of disposing of them. This would trigger a senseless spiral upward of nuclear arms.⁶³

By the time McNamara began to discuss American responses to the Chinese missile threat, the audience must have been convinced that the United States was not about to deploy

⁶¹ Robert S. McNamara, "The Dynamics of Nuclear Strategy," *U.S. Department of Defense News Release No. 868-67*. Address by Honorable Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense Before The United Press International Editors and Publishers, San Francisco, California, September, 18, 1967, 24.

⁶² For a discussion of McNamara's belief that missile defenses are "wasteful and ineffective," see Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 119.

⁶³ Finney, "A Historical Perspective," 32.

any kind of ballistic missile defense. To the surprise of the audience, McNamara in a stunning reversal announced the deployment of the Sentinel ABM system—a thin anti-missile defense to guard against the emerging Chinese missile threat.⁶⁴ He explained that the system would be relatively inexpensive and technically capable of countering a limited missile attack or an accidental launch.⁶⁵ McNamara defended the deployment, charging that a missile-equipped China might “become so incautious as to attempt a nuclear attack on the United States.”⁶⁶ He concluded that “there are marginal grounds for concluding that a light deployment of U.S. ABMs against this possibility is prudent.”⁶⁷ But McNamara warned that “the danger in deploying this light and reliable Chinese-oriented ABM system is going to be the that pressure will develop to expand it into a heavy Soviet-oriented ABM system.”⁶⁸

McNamara’s support of Sentinel was the most unenthusiastic and reluctant endorsement by a defense secretary of any new weapons system since the end of the second world war. The speech constituted an amazing contradiction in logic. Why was an assured destruction capability sufficient to deter Moscow but not Beijing? Ironically, the speech that was supposed to launch America’s first realistic ABM program also provided critics with the rhetorical firepower to oppose it.

⁶⁴ McNamara, “The Dynamics of Nuclear Strategy,” 1.

⁶⁵ Benson D. Adams, *Ballistic Missile Defense* (New York: American Elsevier Co., 1971), 167.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

In retrospect, the contradictions in "The Dynamics of Nuclear Strategy" can be explained by examining the domestic political climate surrounding the announcement. A recently declassified memorandum entitled "Dealing with the ABM Problem" reveals the primary motivation underlying the Sentinel decision: "a need to deal with the ABM problem in a positive way during the forthcoming Congress."⁶⁹ Some very influential Senators and Congressmen—Rivers, Stennis, Thurmond, Jackson, and Russell, among others—were publicly championing ABM deployment. Both the detonation of the Chinese H-bomb in June and Chinese missile testing in July of 1966, gave them an opportunity to exert enormous pressure on the Administration to deploy missile defenses. House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman Mendel Rivers openly warned that the President might be held personally responsible for "leaving the American public defenseless."⁷⁰ Reinforcing this position, the service chiefs testified before Congress giving their unanimous support for deploying a missile defense.

Despite the political pressure, McNamara continued his staunch opposition to ABM deployment. In a 9 January 1967 memorandum written to the President he reiterated his opposition stating "that Mr. Vance and I recommend against [ABM] deployment."⁷¹ McNamara preparing the President on his upcoming meeting with HASC Chairmen, advised the Lyndon Johnson to warn Mendel Rivers "that we are in the midst of a war, and nothing

⁶⁹ Foy D. Kohler, "Dealing with the ABM Problem," Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, 11 January 1967, declassified 12-11-89.

⁷⁰ Morton Halperin, "The Decision to Deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration," *World Politics* 25 (October 1972): 62.

⁷¹ Robert McNamara, "Memorandum for the President," 9 January 1967, declassified 6-22-84.

could be more divisive and harmful to our country than to have a public wrangle between the Chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee and the President.”⁷²

To complicate matters for President Johnson, Governor Ronald Reagan of California and Republican nominee Richard Nixon were making noises about raising the “ABM gap” as issue in the 1968 Presidential election. Nixon warned that failure to deploy ABM was “a deadly boomerang.”⁷³ He was referring to President Johnson’s previous role as an architect of the “bomber gap” and “missile gap” issues which had “bedeviled the Republicans years before.”⁷⁴

Under pressure from Congress and the JCS and conscious of the political saliency of perceived defense gaps, Johnson grew impatient with his Secretary of Defense. With their relationship already strained over Vietnam, Johnson could no longer defer to McNamara on such an important and increasingly controversial issue. Johnson ordered McNamara to alter his original draft to include support for limited ABM deployments.⁷⁵

McNamara’s heart was not in the Sentinel deployment. A quintessential Owl, McNamara opposed missile defenses on principle. As early as December 1966, however, he had acknowledged the terrible political dilemma facing the President.⁷⁶ He understood

⁷² McNamara, “Memorandum to the President,” 9 January 1967.

⁷³ Finney, “A Historical Perspective,” 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Adams, *Ballistic Missile Defense*, 161.

⁷⁶ Notes on meeting with the President in Austin, Texas, December 6, 1966 with Secretary McNamara and Joint Chiefs of Staff. Originally Top Secret Eyes Only For The President, Declassified 1-3-90. LBJ Library E.O 12356, Sec. 3-4.

that it “was extremely hard to make a case for a policy which appeared to deny protection to our people” and hinted that his fallback position would be to deploy limited defenses to protect against a Chinese ICBM capability.⁷⁷

Preserving the strategic balance with the Soviets was McNamara’s paramount consideration. To him, the “Chinese threat” was a sideshow. Realizing that the President could no longer resist the mounting political pressure to deploy ABMs, McNamara crafted the Sentinel initiative in terms of the Chinese threat to alleviate domestic political pressure without undermining the strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

McNamara’s hand-written changes to the “Dealing with the ABM Problem” memorandum reflect his recognition that the Sentinel decision had become unavoidable. The text originally had recommended that the President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of State should “avoid references to ABM.”⁷⁸ McNamara altered the memo to read “avoid ‘enthusiastic’ references.”⁷⁹ This might explain his unenthusiastic endorsement of Sentinel. Twenty years later he would admit that the Sentinel announcement was purely political:

The only reason it [the Sentinel announcement] was in there was to recognize the political pressure and the fact that the Congress had authorized such a system, appropriated for it, and was pushing unmercifully to deploy.⁸⁰

In 1967 the Sentinel deployment passed the Congress by a wide margin. Despite McNamara’s private opposition, ABM advocates were successful in pressuring the President

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Kohler, “Dealing with the ABM Problem.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “Visions of Star Wars: A NOVA/Frontline Special Report,” No. 5008 (Boston: WGBH Foundation, 1986), 13.

to deploy Sentinel because they fostered a favorable political climate of opinion toward ABM. Images of the "Chinese missile threat" and an "ABM gap" were decisive in reinforcing their arguments in favor of Sentinel. While ABM opponents staunchly opposed the deployment, they lacked salient images to reinforce their arguments. Anti-ABM voices seemed like a whisper beneath the choir of voices calling for immediate ABM deployments.

The ABM debate, however, was far from over. In the next year, the voices of anti-ABM forces would grow louder as they seized opportunities to manipulate powerful images of their own. Although a 1967 poll clearly emphasized an attitude of "public indifference" toward ABM deployment, before the debate was over it would touch towns and cities across America.

C. NOT IN MY BACKYARD!

Toward the end of the Johnson Administration, the U.S. Army announced the first ten locations of Sentinel ABM bases. The locations were selected to provide "key geographic and strategic coverage" for the whole nation.⁸¹ Although the 400-mile range of the Sentinel system allowed basing well outside America's metropolitan areas, the Army selected eight major cities as ABM bases. Driving the decision to select heavily populated areas was the Army's desire to enlarge the Sentinel system to protect against a heavy Soviet attack. As fate and a lack of political sensitivity would have it, the Army selected Chicago and Seattle—hot beds of scientific activism—as the initial Sentinel bases. The Doves were handed a key opportunity to take a stand against ABM deployment.

⁸¹ Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 130.

Peace activists and committees of scientists rapidly mobilized to organize rallies, town meetings, and protests to demonstrate against Sentinel. Organized opposition to Sentinel began in these large cities and then quickly spread to other potential basing locations. Local leaders fueled the perception that ABM accidents could pose a serious hazard to the public and argued that the proximity of a Sentinel base to a city would actually increase its probability of being attacked. Simultaneously, several Congress members took the floor to point out that Sentinel deployments would be unacceptable to their constituents. To exacerbate public anxieties, ABM opponents raised concerns over Sentinel's effect on property values, the character of the neighborhood, insurance rates, and even television reception. Using their strong media connections, myth makers nurtured public fears until they exploded in open dissent.

Towns and counties surrounding Chicago began passing resolutions forbidding Sentinel deployment. In the midst of a political fire storm, the Army decided to break its policy of silence by sending its representatives to local meetings to try to alleviate public fears. In Waukegan, the Army sent its top team of John Foster, the director of Defense Research and Engineering, and General Alfred Starbird, the program manager for the Sentinel system. The meeting was attended by several prominent local scientists who opposed ABM. During the meeting, John Erskine, an Argonne National Laboratories scientist, quietly distributed hundred of pamphlets detailing the horrid devastation that could result from the accidental explosion of "just one warhead at the ABM site."⁸² Foster and Starbird's technical discussion of Sentinel did little to calm public fears. Instead of directly

⁸² Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 142.

addressing the issue of accidental detonation, the military experts cautiously dodged the issue. After the meeting Erskine, supported by other activists, addressed the public and the media. He repeatedly emphasized the issue of accidental explosion declaring that he would have "no missiles in my backyard."⁸³

To the surprise of many activists, the issue of "no missiles in my backyard" resonated with the public and became the cornerstone of opposition to Sentinel. Encouraged by scientists, leaders of the ABM opposition had set out to educate the public on the serious dangers of the nuclear arms race. At first, they feared that the "no missiles in my backyard" slogan would cloud the real issues and be regarded as pure demagoguery by the national media. But once the images of accidental nuclear explosion were unleashed on the American people, discussions of nuclear doctrine and strategy became futile and unnecessary for Sentinel's opponents.

Congressmen and Senators from the effected areas immediately felt the brunt of constituency outrage. Senate minority leader, Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) received almost a thousand letters a week from constituents opposing Sentinel.⁸⁴ Dirksen abandoned his staunch support for Sentinel and demanded a congressional review of Sentinel funding. After meeting with Washington's anti-ABM coalition, Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-Wa.), possibly the strongest ABM supporter in the Senate, pressured the Army to move an ABM site out of Seattle.⁸⁵ The Army relocated the site to Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound. But

⁸³ Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 142.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 135.

Bainbridge Island's Representative, Thomas Kelly (R-Wa.), another previous ABM supporter, immediately protested the move, forcing the Army to search for another location.⁸⁶

The strong reaction to Sentinel basing in many areas of the country represents the connection between images and the political salience of an issue. Compelling the public to imagine the nuclear devastation of their homes and communities evokes strong emotions. Local opposition to missile defenses was a direct result of the myth maker's use of vivid images to connect adverse nuclear consequences with missile defense deployments. Furious local protest at nearly every potential ABM base prompted newly elected President Nixon to halt Sentinel deployment pending further review. Several weeks later, he announced that all ABM sites would be moved from cities to remote locations.

On 14 March 1969, the President canceled the Sentinel program and replaced it with a new missile defense initiative called Safeguard.⁸⁷ The new ABM system would have different priorities. Instead of protecting American cities against a light Chinese nuclear attack, Safeguard "would protect America's deterrent" that was "becoming increasingly vulnerable" to Soviet attack.⁸⁸ Protecting American cities against the Chinese threat or an accidental launch would be a secondary mission. Although Safeguard was almost identical to Sentinel in capabilities and cost, it had an increasingly less demanding defensive mission of protecting missile silos in order to reinforce Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

⁸⁶ Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 148.

⁸⁷ Adams, *Ballistic Missile Defense*, 194.

⁸⁸ Finney, "A Historical Perspective," 36.

Reorienting ABM priorities was a politically savvy move. By removing ABM sites from suburban locations, Nixon defused the grass-roots protest that was engulfing Congress. In the wake of America's post-Sputnik paranoia, it was also easier to sell an anti-Soviet system than one designed to counter a tenuous Chinese missile threat. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's statements epitomized the shift in strategic debate. "The Russians are going after our missiles," he warned, "and they are going for a first strike capability. There is no question about that."⁸⁹

Although the administration had quieted public outrage over ABM, they underestimated the enthusiasm some Senators and scientific activists had for defeating the system. Senator William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, questioned Laird's motives and accused him of "using a technique of fear to sell the ABM program."⁹⁰ More important, the critics argued that the Sentinel (renamed Safeguard) system was designed for area vice point defenses; its technical suitability for protecting missile fields was dubious. Congressional critics immediately seized the issue. For weeks the Senate was embroiled in technical hearings. Figure 2-1 is Paul Conrad cartoon that depicts Senators erupting like a "Multiple Warhead" through the Capitol dome.

Prior to the 1969 ABM Debate, independent scientists rarely testified before the military committees of Congress. The exception had been the secret hearing of the late 1940s concerning development of the hydrogen bomb. Only in 1954—after the transcript of the hearings was declassified—did the public find out the full scope of the scientific

⁸⁹ Finney, "A Historical Perspective," 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

controversy. A barrage of letters from peace organizations and scientists requesting a hearing on ABM convinced the military committees to allow opposition witnesses to testify.

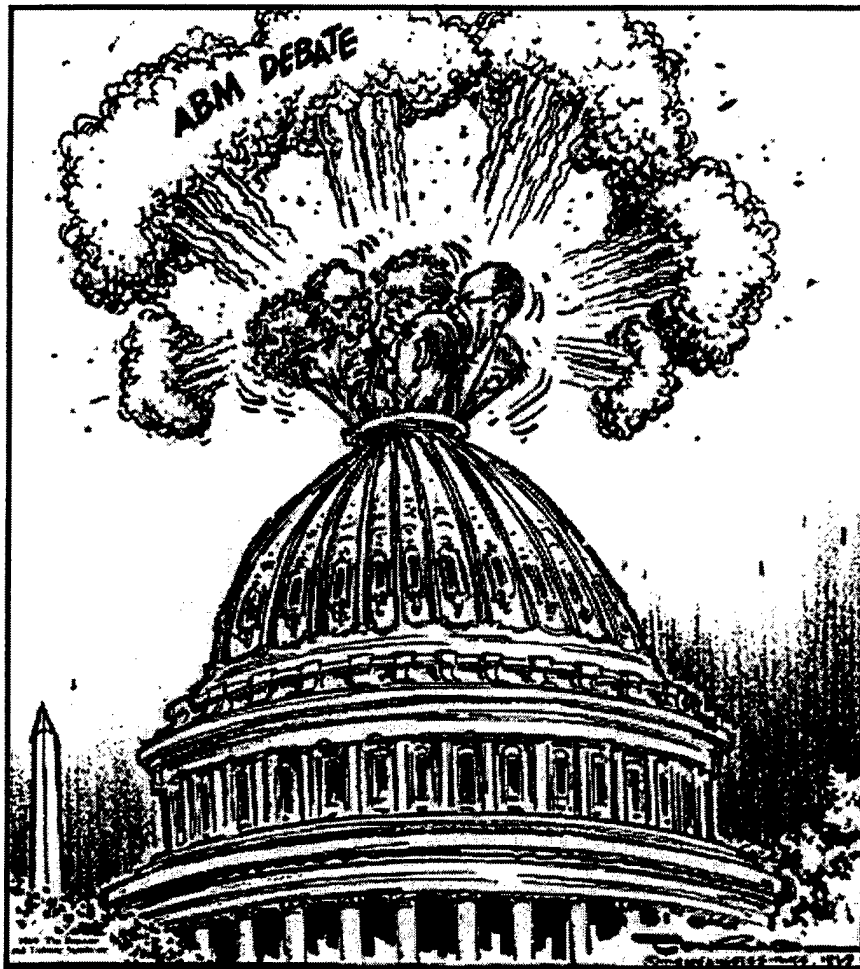


Figure 2-1: “Multiple Warhead.” (Copyright Paul Conrad and Los Angeles Times, 1969; reprinted with permission)

Scientists played a crucial role in the 1969 ABM debate by forcing a public discussion of the issues. Seventy percent of the sixty scientists that testified before Congress opposed the Safeguard system.⁹¹ It is uncertain whether the public would have become aware of pervasive anti-ABM sentiment among scientists, including the President’s Science

⁹¹ Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 188.

Advisory Committee, if the efforts by peace organizations and scientists to open congressional hearings had not been successful. The scientists' auxiliary assertions concerning technical and economic feasibility served to reinforce the strategic myth that missile defenses might bring nuclear devastation home to America's backyards.

On 1 August 1968, the funding of the deployment of Sentinel had passed the Senate by a 46 to 27 margin.⁹² One year and five days later, after the political firestorm, Safeguard would come extremely close to defeat.

The Safeguard debate centered around the Cooper-Hart Amendment, a provision that would prohibit Safeguard deployment but allow continued missile defense research and development. Leading the charge for the Administration was Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) and Senator John Tower (R-Tx.). Goldwater criticized ABM opponents for "proposing self full-filling prophecies by arguing that since the land-based deterrent missile force was vulnerable it should not be defended."⁹³ Tower rejected anti-ABM scientists testimony as inconsistent, claiming that "all missiles, radars, and other components had been built and tested for the Safeguard ABM system."⁹⁴

The week before the vote, the opposition launched a series of full-page newspaper ads and a massive grass-roots letter writing campaign.⁹⁵ These efforts emphasized the "public danger" of deploying missile defenses. Compounding the Administration's ABM

⁹² *U.S. Congressional Record*, 1 August 1968, S9990.

⁹³ Warren Weaver, "Nixon Missile Plan Wins in Senate," *New York Times*, 7 August 1969, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Stoffer, *Congressional Defense Policy*, 195.

problem was the bipartisan nature of the opposition, which included several respected Republican Senators including Cooper, Aiken, Javits, and Smith.

The vote count was so close that suspense hung on every Senator's announcement. In the final round of debates, Senator Albert Gore, Sr. (D-Tn.) presented a "mountain of evidence" suggesting that Safeguard was "unsuitable for hard point defenses."⁹⁶ At the last minute Senator Warren Magnuson (D-Wash.) acknowledged his opposition to Safeguard.⁹⁷ On the eve of the vote, ABM opponents concluded that they had at least 50 of the 51 votes required to prevent Safeguard's deployment.⁹⁸

On 6 August 1969, Senator Smith (R-Me.) introduced an amendment barring funding for Safeguard but allowing other BMD research. The provision was defeated 50-51.⁹⁹ Although it was unnecessary, Vice President Agnew cast the deciding vote for symbolic reasons. In an ironic twist, the next day Smith voted against the Cooper-Hart amendment because it permitted continued ABM research and development which she opposed.¹⁰⁰ The amendment was defeated 49-51.

Never before had a President's proposal to fund a major weapons system come so close to defeat. The Safeguard votes were symbolic of a brewing congressional rebellion against the unquestioned executive dominance of security policy. Congress put the Executive

⁹⁶ John W. Finney, "Senate Panel, with Film and Reports, Rests Case Against ABM," *New York Times*, 31 July 1969, 8.

⁹⁷ Adams, *Ballistic Missile Defense*, 219.

⁹⁸ Ibid. According to Senate rules a tie vote defeats an amendment.

⁹⁹ Weaver, "Nixon Missile Plan Wins in Senate," 22.

¹⁰⁰ Adams, 220.

on notice that the defense budgets would be subjected to careful scrutiny in the future. The ABM debate marked the end of complete executive branch control of national security affairs. Moreover, auxiliary assertions about the economic and technical feasibility of missile defenses became increasingly central to reinforcing the argument that missile defenses are dangerous and destabilizing, a trend that continues in recent ABM debates.

D. A BARGAINING CHIP

In 1970, ABM opponents made a final effort to undermine the deployment of Safeguard. Absent the publicity of the 1969 controversy, the anti-ABM caucus staunchly opposed the an administration request to expand Safeguard from two to four sites. Opponents recycled the arguments that Safeguard was technically unreliable and destabilizing.¹⁰¹

Senator Robert Dole (R-Kan.) emerged as the point man for the administration on ABM. Dole discounted the opposition's arguments and questioned the wisdom of congressional intervention in Presidential policies:

He [Nixon] is winding down the war in Southeast Asia. We do have a cease-fire in the Middle East. We are making some progress at the SALT talks. Why should we in Congress, in view of these accomplishments, seek to impose our judgement on the country when it come to ABM or some other weapons system?¹⁰²

Safeguard advocates claimed the Administration's aggressive ABM deployment was a critical "bargaining chip" in negotiations with the Soviets. Senator Jackson claimed that

¹⁰¹ "Senate Defeats Effort to Restrict ABM Deployment," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 14 August 1970, 2035.

¹⁰² Ibid, 2036.

“there is virtual unanimity by the Government and the U.S. arms negotiating team on the need to maintain momentum on ABM for further progress at the arms talks.”¹⁰³

Suspecting another close vote, President Nixon ordered Ambassador Gerald Smith, head of the U.S. delegation to the SALT talks, to send a letter to wavering and uncommitted Senators.¹⁰⁴ Although Smith denied any knowledge of the pending amendments, he expressed concern that the “static condition” of ABM systems could undermine the negotiations.¹⁰⁵ The 1970 Cooper-Hart Amendment failed by a 47-52 vote, a three vote margin of approval for Safeguard. Several Senators openly acknowledged that Smith’s telegram was the decisive factor in changing their vote.

The Great ABM Debate was over. The President’s position as the nation’s chief negotiator gave him considerable leverage to offer incentives, twist arms, and frame the terms of the debate to achieve his policy goals. For the true believers in missile defense, the victory proved hollow because strategic defenses would never be completely deployed.

Emphasizing the “Russian threat” gave the President his “bargaining chip” at the negotiating table. But arguing that missile defenses were necessary to reinforce mutually assured destruction unwittingly undermined ABM deployments by establishing the preeminence of the doctrine of strategic stability. In the early seventies, a temporary consensus emerged that arms control—not missile defenses—would be the best means of safeguarding strategic stability. Nixon’s negotiation of the SALT and ABM treaties

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Finney, “A Historical Perspective,” 40.

¹⁰⁵ “Senate Defeats Effort to Restrict ABM Deployment,” 2036

submerged the missile defense issue in an ocean of detente. It would not surface again until President Reagan's famous call to "render nuclear warheads impotent and obsolete."

G. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND THE GREAT ABM DEBATE

The convergence of forces that culminated in "The Great ABM Debate" marked a shift in the relationship between the Congress and the Executive. Underlying the Great ABM Debate were deeply held disparate convictions concerning the strategic utility of missile defenses; a balance of strategic myths had emerged among U.S. foreign policy elites. Today, the assertive congressional oversight of strategic issues reflects the same conflicting arguments about the relationship between nuclear weapons, missile defenses, and security that had fueled the initial ABM debate.

During the "Great ABM Debate," a lack of concrete evidence to support their assertions drove the key players to seize powerful images to reinforce their strategic arguments. The President, executive officials, congressional defense policy elites, and interest group leaders all tried to shape congressional attitudes. From the concerns about a perceived "ABM Gap" that drove the Sentinel decision, to portrayal of nuclear devastation in America's backyards, to the demand for a bargaining chip to thwart the Soviets, political imagery proved decisive in every phase of the debate.

The "Great ABM Debate" highlighted the preeminence of Presidential myth making. Toward the end of the debate, President Nixon effectively used his position to shape congressional attitudes. Nixon and other key missile defense advocates tried to exploit public fears that "the Russians were coming" to reinforce their arguments for missile

defenses. Moreover, the administration effectively manipulated the status of arms control negotiations to win congressional battles by creating the perception that missile defenses were a critical bargaining chip in delicate negotiations with the Soviets. Defeating the President on matters of national defense is difficult and rare. Despite the convergence of a conglomerate of powerful interests, the Executive—through force of political power and position—won every vote during the ABM debate. The opposition, however, was often successful without actually defeating the President on the floors of Congress.

Through vivid, emotion-laden images, ABM opponents were able to disperse the cloud of public indifference on defense issues. Congressional and interest group leaders mobilized political movements to create the perception of intense public awareness of strategic issues. Exploiting images of nuclear devastation, missile defense opponents fueled the “no missiles in my backyard” argument that enabled citizens to identify with the hazards and inconveniences of the Sentinel program. Presidents Johnson and Nixon failed to address these public anxieties, allowing other political elites to frame the missile defense issue in a negative political context. As a result, the Nixon Administration was forced to cancel the Sentinel and the margin of congressional opinion favoring any type of missile defenses was diminished substantially.

The ABM debate illustrated that a handful of influential individuals can manipulate powerful images to frame the term of the debate and perpetuate their own strategic beliefs to facilitate noticeable shifts in the nation’s defense policy. After the ABM debate, the balance of strategic myths endured. The next national debate over nuclear strategy would be even more divisive, and myth making would be integral to its outcome.

III. THE NUCLEAR FREEZE AND SDI

Ronald Wilson Reagan—arguably the most hawkish President of the post-War era—was elected by an overwhelming margin in November of 1980. During the campaign, Reagan likened arms control to appeasement and portrayed President Carter as “weak” in his handling of U.S.-Soviet relations—a problem he pledged to correct, if elected. Upon inauguration, Reagan implemented his anti-Soviet defense policies. Less than two years later, on June 12, 1982, approximately one million protestors marched in New York City in a show of opposition to Reagan’s nuclear policies.¹⁰⁶ In the largest anti-nuclear demonstration in U.S. history, protestors demanded an immediate bilateral freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons.¹⁰⁷ For well over a decade, national polls had consistently indicated that a majority of the electorate favored arms control.¹⁰⁸ But the public’s nuclear anxieties had generally remained politically dormant.¹⁰⁹ In the early eighties, America’s nuclear anxiety burst into widespread political action.

Throughout the seventies, the residue from 1960s anti-war movement offered the organizational potential for a widespread social movement.¹¹⁰ But the political opportunity

¹⁰⁶ David S. Meyer, *Winter of Discontent* (New York; Praeger, 1990), xiii.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Otto Klineberg, “Public Opinion and Nuclear War,” *The American Psychologists Review* 39 (1984): 1245.

¹⁰⁹ David Yost, “The Delegitimization of Nuclear Deterrence,” *Armed Forces and Society* 16 no. 4 (Summer 1990): 489. Yost states that “Western publics are normally much more preoccupied with social and economic issues than with the threat of nuclear war. The American appear to share with most other Western publics a resigned and relatively stable ambivalence that accepts nuclear deterrence within an overall policy of peace and strength.”

¹¹⁰ Meyer, 149.

for social mobilization did not come until a series of events—the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Three Mile Island, and the Reagan administration's bellicose anti-Soviet rhetoric—aroused public fear of the dangers of nuclear technology and war. Leftist elites seized this political opportunity to transform the potential for social mobilization into political action.¹¹¹ Nurturing the public's fear of nuclear war, peace activists cultivated the nuclear freeze as a unifying concept to mobilize a wide array of organizations and individuals under a single banner. The movement quickly gathered momentum. In less than two years, the Freeze Campaign moved from the fringes of political legitimacy to the halls of Congress, claiming substantial victories through congressional resolutions and voter referendums.¹¹² But as David Meyer points out, "despite the proliferation of anti-nuclear activities during Reagan's first term, the freeze movement suddenly faded from the public eye with equally surprising alacrity."¹¹³ To the dismay of the freeze activists, President Reagan was reelected by a huge margin and his defense program remained largely intact.

To understand the volatile history of the freeze movement—both its rise and decline—one must explore of how key individuals manipulated powerful images to legitimize and popularize their strategic arguments surrounding the freeze proposal.

¹¹¹ For an explanation of the importance of organizational potential and political opportunities in developing social movements see Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.) For explanation of the early mobilizing activities of freeze movement see Pam Solo, *From Protest to Policy: Beyond the Freeze to Common Security* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co, 1988), 18-50.

¹¹² Frances B. McCrea and Gerald E. Markle, *Minutes to Midnight: Nuclear Weapons Protest in America* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1989), 15.

¹¹³ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, xiv.

Perpetuating images of nuclear holocaust, activists capitalized on public anxieties to generate broad support for the freeze proposal. The freeze movement quickly came to be seen as an expression of opposition to the newly elected President's defense policies.¹¹⁴

In response, President Reagan crafted his announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to alleviate the public fears that were driving the opposition to his nuclear program. Reagan compelled the public to imagine a world where strategic defenses offered the hope "that our children and grandchildren could live in a world free of the constant threat of nuclear war."¹¹⁵ SDI had powerful appeal, because unlike the freeze, it captured the American ethos of optimism, self-reliance, technical innovation, and manifest destiny.¹¹⁶ Thus, the demise of the nuclear freeze movement was not a political accident. It was the conscious effort of the most savvy politician to occupy the White House since Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹¹⁷

This chapter examines the role of myth makers and myth making in the nuclear debate of early 1980s. Section A examines the origins and imagery of the freeze movement. Section B explains how freeze leaders manipulated the language and symbolism of the freeze movement to garner congressional support for their preferred policies. Section C examines

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey W. Knopf, *Domestic Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1991.

¹¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 550.

¹¹⁶ Michael Vlahos, *Strategic Defense and the American Ethos* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 15.

¹¹⁷ This assertion is not completely new; see, for example, Bruce Russett, "Democracy, Public Opinion, and Nuclear Weapons," in *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War* Vol. 1, ed. Philip E. Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern, and Charles Tilly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 194. In contrast to other arguments, however, I argue that Reagan's purposeful mastery of political imagery proved decisive in neutralizing the freeze.

the motivations underlying President Reagan's decision to pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and how his effective use of political imagery served to neutralize the freeze movement. Section D draws lessons from the freeze and SDI initiatives to suggest implications for future ABM debates.

A. ORIGINS OF THE FREEZE MOVEMENT

Most political scientists attribute credit for the rapid growth of the nuclear freeze movement directly to the election of Ronald Reagan.¹¹⁸

What Ronald Reagan did, that no previous president had done, was to rip off the physic bandage that covers public fears and anxieties over nuclear weapons. Americans, simply put, do not like to dwell on the subject of nuclear war, and they become skittish when their leaders talk about it.¹¹⁹

The Reagan administration's aggressive, belligerent tone and seemingly casual references to nuclear weapons employment clearly provided fuel for the nuclear freeze movement. The foundation of the movement, however, was laid well prior to Reagan's election. Reagan's rhetoric simply served to exacerbate public concerns about nuclear war that had already been deliberately cultivated by liberal elites in organized peace movements, Congress, and the media. After the demise of the Freeze Campaign, top movement leaders would accuse President Reagan of "manipulating the public's anti-nuclear sentiments to confuse and

¹¹⁸ See Robert Leavitt, *Freezing the Arms Race: The Genesis of Mass Movement*, unpublished Kennedy School of Government Case Study, Harvard University, 1983; Douglas C. Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze* (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1987); Adam M. Garfinkle, *The Politics of The Nuclear Freeze* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1984); and A. Cockburn and J. Ridgeway, "The Freeze Movement versus Reagan," *The New Left* 137, 5-21.

¹¹⁹ Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze*, 18.

obfuscate the substantive issues."¹²⁰ What they fail to admit is that they also employed similar tactics to generate public support for the freeze proposal.

The nuclear freeze movement was built on the foundation of previous protest movements. After the Vietnam War, most protest movements failed to garner much attention, with one exception, the anti-nuclear power movement. In 1971, the Union for Concerned Scientists (UCS), a group of scientists formed to oppose nuclear weapons and anti-ballistic missile deployments, began to focus on the safety of nuclear power reactors. They released a report claiming that the Atomic Energy Commission's safety program was seriously flawed and that reactor protection systems were inadequate to prevent a nuclear meltdown.¹²¹ Using this information, Ralph Nadar organized his national anti-nuclear campaign, Critical Mass, which took to protesting at various nuclear power plants. Critical Mass enjoyed only modest public support until an accident at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania captured the media spotlight, giving the movement added momentum and much greater popular support. By coincidence, Jane Fonda's anti-nuclear protest film *The China Syndrome*, which depicted the dangers of nuclear power, was released almost simultaneously. The movie only added to public anxieties.

Capitalizing on the anti-nuclear power momentum created by the Three Mile Island accident, the UCS and other peace activist moved to focus the public imagination on the dangers of nuclear war. The Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), for example,

¹²⁰ Randal Kehler, "Message From the National Coordinator," *Freeze Focus*, 4 December 1984, 3.

¹²¹ Robert Mitchell, "From Elite Quarrel to Mass Movement," *Society* 18 (1981): 76-84.

developed a national campaign that distributed lectures and films describing the hypothetical medical consequences of exploding a one megaton bomb over a typical American city.¹²² Movement leaders credit PSR's efforts as laying the essential groundwork for the Freeze Campaign. Activists also began to articulate a linkage between nuclear power and nuclear weapons, making tenuous claims. For example, they stated:

Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are two sides of the same coin. They both give off the same radioactive poisons, generate the same deadly waste . . . and both threaten catastrophic destruction. The people who brought you Hiroshima now bring us Harrisburg.¹²³

Henry Kendall—a founder of the UCS—admitted that “the dangers of nuclear power are small compared with nuclear war.”¹²⁴ But influenced by polls showing widespread public ignorance about nuclear issues,¹²⁵ peace activists continued to use images of mushroom clouds over nuclear power plants to incite public fears. Despite the obvious distortion of scientific facts, the idea that nuclear power plants could achieve the “critical mass” necessary for an atomic explosion linked the anti-nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear power movements both organizationally and in the minds of the public. The image of a nuclear meltdown right in their backyards enabled people to connect with hazards and inconveniences of nuclear technology.

In the spring of 1979, approximately 100,000 anti-nuclear protesters marched on Washington, capturing the media spotlight. Peace activists, frequently cited as nuclear

¹²² Solo, *From Protest to Policy*, 67.

¹²³ M. Kaku, “Ban Nuke Power, Ban Nuke Weapons,” *The Guardian*, 9 May 1979, 1.

¹²⁴ F. Butterfield, “Anatomy of Nuclear Protest,” *New York Times Magazine*, 11 May 1982, 16-17.

¹²⁵ McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 95.

experts by the media, vividly described the devastating effects of nuclear accidents and explosions.¹²⁶ During the early eighties, these efforts succeeded in fueling an anti-nuclear media frenzy. Mainstream news stories and fictional accounts began to perpetuate anti-nuclear themes. Media coverage of nuclear issues increased sharply, remaining unusually high through the end of 1983.¹²⁷ Between 1980 and 1983, *The New York Times* and *CBS*, for example, both had over a ten-fold increase in nuclear related stories.¹²⁸ The *Times* anti-nuclear focus peaked at more than 100 stories a month in the summer of 1982.

Books like Jonathon Schell's horrific description of nuclear holocaust, *The Fate of Earth*, and Roger Molander's *Nuclear War, What's In It For You?* became best sellers. The American Medical Association passed a resolution compelling doctors to inform their patients of the dangers of nuclear war.¹²⁹ The political landscape was thoroughly groomed for a disarmament push.

Underlying these events, the political entrepreneurship and organizational capability of a single individual focused the movement's energy on a common policy initiative. While peace activists were generally successful in stoking nuclear fears, they failed to offer the public a clear policy prescription. One activist explained, "people were really scared out of their pants by our presentation and saying 'What can we do?'"¹³⁰ Randall Fosberg, a defense

¹²⁶ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, 176.

¹²⁷ Knopf, *Domestic Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 343.

¹²⁸ Meyer, 123-128.

¹²⁹ McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 106.

¹³⁰ Leavitt, *Freezing the Arms Race*, 31.

analyst and the Director of the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies, stood ready to provide the answer.

Fosberg, with her elite education and background, recognized early the potential for a mass movement calling for changes in U.S. nuclear policy.¹³¹ Intrigued by Senator Mark Hatfield's (R-OR) proposals to amend the SALT II treaty to include a bilateral freeze of nuclear weapons, she saw the freeze proposal as the ultimate vehicle to mobilize and unify existing anti-nuclear groups.¹³² In December 1979, Fosberg issued her *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms* to 600 activists at the Mobilization for Survival's annual convention. She called for all activists to rally around the bilateral freeze on the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles.

The freeze proposal caught on rapidly. During the 1980 election cycle, Randy Kehler, a prominent Vietnam War protestor, succeeded in getting a freeze proposal on the ballot in three western Massachusetts voting districts. The initiatives all passed with more than a fifty percent margin, giving Fosberg and other movement leaders confidence in the political salience of the issue.¹³³ For the movement to succeed nationally, however, Fosberg believed that it had to appeal "to the majority of middle class, middle-of-the-road citizens."¹³⁴ That meant exploiting the activist infrastructure to form a majority movement while resisting the wider anti-imperialist, antiracist, antisexist, anti-interventionist, and pro-Soviet agendas

¹³¹ For a description of Fosberg's "elite education and background" see McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 97-98.

¹³² Ibid, 101.

¹³³ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, 183.

¹³⁴ Leavitt, *Freezing the Arms Race*, 13.

of many of the participating groups.¹³⁵ As she explained, "I was very concerned that the idea should not be co-opted and sort of diminished by the more radical peace groups with whom I was working and relying on."¹³⁶

In March of 1981, at the First National Strategy Conference of the Freeze Campaign, Fosberg fought hard to keep the movement a single issue, moderate campaign. She made it clear that it would be her way or the highway.¹³⁷ While a few groups dropped out of the movement, Fosberg succeeded in convincing the majority of the activists to embrace her simplistic message and to help foster the "heartland image" needed to insure broad middle class appeal.¹³⁸ The Conference adopted Fosberg's strategy of generating popular pressure to force lawmakers to "adopt the freeze as a national policy objective."¹³⁹

B. THE NUCLEAR FREEZE BECOMES A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Assisted by Reagan administration rhetoric and the media, the Freeze Campaign fed on the widespread fear of nuclear war. Building on their techniques of "whipping audiences into a frenzied anger" by describing nuclear "bombing runs" on the local towns and cities, activists began ending their speeches with calls for political action to support the freeze.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, 165.

¹³⁶ Leavitt, *Freezing The Arms Race*, 23.

¹³⁷ McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 103.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Knopf, *Domestic Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 328.

¹⁴⁰ Leavitt, *Freezing the Arms Race*, 30-31.

In April of 1982, the Freeze Campaign gained national prominence attracting widespread media coverage during Ground Zero Week. Reporters covering the anti-nuclear events claimed that "over one million Americans, in more than 600 cities and 350 college campuses, attended seminars, watched films, and flocked to rallies."¹⁴¹ After the event, opinion polls showed that more than seventy percent of the American people supported the freeze.¹⁴²

Senators Edward Kennedy and Mark Hatfield recognized early that "the sleeping giant of public opinion had awakened."¹⁴³ They effectively captured the language and symbolism of the freeze movement in their book *Freeze! How you Can Prevent Nuclear War*. In conjunction with Congressman Edward Markey, Kennedy and Hatfield introduced a joint Freeze Resolution in the House and Senate claiming that "it is time to take the first decisive step back from the brink."¹⁴⁴ By the time anti-nuclear protestors gathered in New York for their June 12, 1982, demonstration, Kennedy had given the Freeze Campaign mainstream political legitimacy, enlisting the support of 169 U.S. Representatives and 25 Senators.¹⁴⁵ Randall Fosberg exalted "we've done it. The nuclear freeze campaign has mobilized the biggest peacetime movement in United States history."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Waller, *Congress and the Nuclear Freeze*, 345.

¹⁴² M. Milburn, P. Watanaba, and B. Kramer, "The Nature and Sources of Attitudes Toward A Nuclear Freeze," *Political Psychology* 7 (1986): 661-674.

¹⁴³ Edward Kennedy and Mark Hatfield, *Freeze! How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 123.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in *Freeze Newsletter* 2 (1982): 1.

¹⁴⁵ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, 183.

¹⁴⁶ R. Herman, "Rally, Speakers Decry Cost of Nuclear Arms Race," *New York Times*, 12 June 1982, A43.

As the freeze gathered momentum in public opinion polls and in Congress, it was perceived as a reflection of widespread public dissatisfaction with the Reagan defense program. The White House began to fear that the freeze movement would spill over into congressional debates over its strategic modernization effort. Officials were particularly troubled by the political plight of the MX missile and B-1 bomber.¹⁴⁷ David Gergen, White House communications director at the time, acknowledged that “there was a widespread view in the Administration that the freeze was a dagger pointed at the heart of the Administration’s defense program.”¹⁴⁸ At one National Security Council meeting, Reagan’s Chief of Staff Howard Baker spoke frankly about the freeze: “we’ve got a domestic political problem . . . we need a substantive idea of our own.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, Reagan officials began to try and “find a way to outflank the freeze.”¹⁵⁰ The answer, however, came directly from the President himself.

C. THE ORIGINS OF SDI

Reagan first became inspired by the idea of missile defense during his term as Governor of California. In 1967, he visited Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories where scientist Edward Teller—the inventor of the hydrogen bomb—had acquainted

¹⁴⁷ Donald R. Baucom, *The Origins of SDI 1944-1983* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 181.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Knopf, *Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 394.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Knopf, 394.

¹⁵⁰ Baucom, 182.

President Reagan with the implications of missile defense research.¹⁵¹ At the end of the visit, Reagan commented that history had shown that the “sword always invites the shield.”¹⁵² Shortly after his visit to Livermore, Reagan’s warning of an “ABM gap” contributed to the political pressure that compelled the Johnson administration to announce deployment of the Sentinel ABM system.¹⁵³

By the time he prepared to run for President in 1980, Reagan had developed a deep enmity for the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD). He likened MAD to “having two westerners standing in a saloon aiming their guns at each other’s heads—permanently. There had to be better way.”¹⁵⁴ After being told during a 1979 visit to North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), that the United States military was incapable of stopping a single Soviet missile from striking an American city, Reagan toyed with making strategic defense an issue in his 1980 campaign. Fearing such a move might constitute political suicide, Reagan’s advisors talked him out of it.¹⁵⁵

Ronald Reagan was a masterful politician with a keen sense of timing. He was convinced that the United States should field a defense against missile attacks well prior to his inauguration, yet his Strategic Defense Initiative did not come until after two full years

¹⁵¹ Baucom, *Origins of SDI*, 129.

¹⁵² Dinesh D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 274.

¹⁵³ John W. Finney, “A Historical Perspective,” in Walter Stutzle, Bhupendra Jasani, and Regina Cohen, ed., *The ABM Debate: To Defend or Not to Defend?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 33.

¹⁵⁴ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 547.

¹⁵⁵ Strobe Talbot, *Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and The Nuclear Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 189.

in office. Despite his belief in missile defenses, he chose to bide his time as he pressed for the strategic modernization of America's nuclear forces. In the end, political necessity would drive the timing of his SDI announcement.

D. IMPOTENT AND OBSOLETE: REAGAN NEUTRALIZES THE FREEZE

Scholars underestimate the role that the nuclear freeze had in prompting President Reagan to announce his desire to pursue strategic missile defenses. Jeffery Knopf argues that "undercutting the freeze movement was not the primary intent behind SDI."¹⁵⁶ He correctly points out that the SDI announcement "was a speech that came from the President's heart."¹⁵⁷ In addition, Reagan's refusal to abandon SDI for arms control at Reykjavik further underscores the genuineness of the initiative. This line of reasoning, however, misses the point. There is little question that Reagan was a "true believer" in the Strategic Defense Initiative. But Reagan also understood that missile defense was a long-term solution.¹⁵⁸ Upon election his immediate priority was to modernize America's forces to regain strategic superiority for the United States.¹⁵⁹ Only after the freeze movement succeeded in creating a congressional climate averse to his strategic modernization program, did Reagan turn to SDI. Reagan believed in missile defenses, but he publicly embraced them in March of 1983 because he recognized their potential to outflank the freeze movement, shift the political

¹⁵⁶ Knopf, *Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 465.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Reagan understood that SDI was "a formidable, technical task, one that may not be accomplished before the end of the century." See Reagan, *An American Life*, 575.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 294.

landscape surrounding strategic issues, and remove the obstacles to the rest of his strategic policy. Figure 3.1 is a Brookin's cartoon that depicts the SDI announcement for what it was, an attempt to shoot down the freeze proposal and Congressional Democrats that were opposing Reagan's defense program.

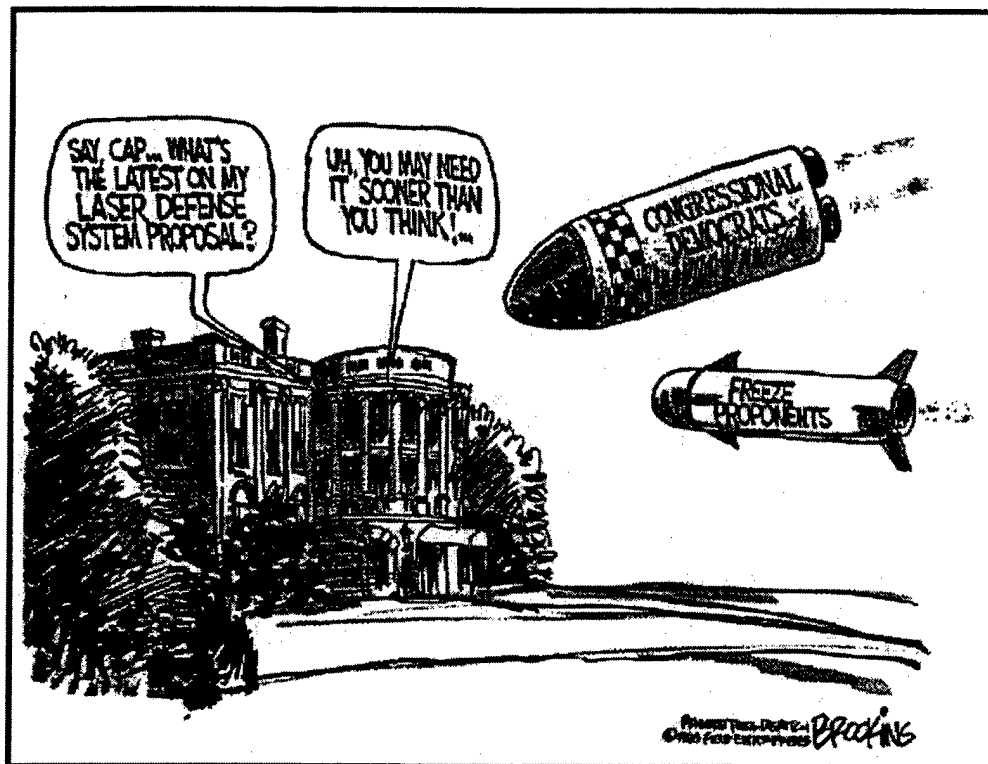


Figure 3-1: "Incoming" (Copyright Richmond Times Dispatch 1983; reprinted with permission.)

Reagan first became preoccupied with the nuclear freeze because its leaders depicted him as "a trigger-happy cowboy" and it threatened his strategic modernization program. Concern with the freeze dominates his discussions of defense policy in his memoirs. For example, he states:

Although I convinced many that I wasn't a trigger-happy cowboy, the nuclear freeze movement marched on unfazed through the summer and fall of 1982, while the Democratic majority in congress tried to kill many of the most important elements of our military modernization program, including the MX missile and B-1 bomber.¹⁶⁰

Reagan noted that to defeat his defense program, congressional Democrats "were exploiting some of the public's understandable fears of nuclear war."¹⁶¹ He became particularly concerned,

when several prominent Senate Republicans joined in calling for the abandonment of the Pentagon modernization program partly because of the heavily publicized views of a minority of Americans who were demonstrating in favor of a nuclear freeze, I commented in my diary in early March: I'm going to take our case to the people.¹⁶²

Reagan drew his strength from his ability to convince the American people of the righteousness of his policies. Because the freeze represented a failure in his ability to communicate, it became personnel. Reagan's daughter Patti became deeply involved in the freeze movement and convinced her father to meet with prominent freeze leaders. After the meeting, Reagan believed he had lost his daughter to the movement.¹⁶³ Polls indicated he was also losing the American people.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Reagan, *An American Life*, 71.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 568.

¹⁶² Ibid, 568.

¹⁶³ Reagan, *An American Life*, 566. Reagan notes in his memoirs, "I am afraid our daughter has been taken over by the whole [freeze] gang."

¹⁶⁴ Polls showed that over sixty percent of the American people favored the freeze. *The Gallup Report*, No. 206, November 1982, 8.

During the months leading up to the SDI announcement, Reagan's MX proposal fell to defeat in Congress and the freeze proposal was gaining support in the Democratically controlled House of Representatives. There was increasing concern in the administration that passage of even the superficial freeze would signal a willingness of the Congress to vote against the President's defense program with impunity.¹⁶⁵ In short, the Reagan defense program was in political disarray.

Realizing that his administration was facing a crisis on strategic policy, Reagan began to push his staff to develop the missile defense concept. Reagan called a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to explore ways "to move away from our total reliance on offense and to deter a nuclear attack and move toward a greater reliance on defense."¹⁶⁶ The JCS—following the lead of Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James Watkins—came back with unanimous support for a missile defense initiative.¹⁶⁷ Presidential advisors, Howard Baker and Mike Deaver, informed the President that "an anti-missile program could have enormous public appeal and saw it as an excellent way to outflank the freeze."¹⁶⁸ Earlier in the meeting, Admiral Watkins had commented "wouldn't it be better to save lives than to avenge them." That phrase struck a responsive chord with the President, who remarked: "don't lose those words."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Knopf, *Domestic Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 393.

¹⁶⁶ See Martin Anderson, *Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jananovich, 1988), 97; and Reagan, *An American Life*, 547.

¹⁶⁷ Baucom, *Origins of SDI*, 192.

¹⁶⁸ Knopf, *Domestic Politics, Citizen Activism, and U.S. Arms Control Policy*, 465.

¹⁶⁹ Baucom, 192.

On March 23, 1983, the President Reagan announced his decision to pursue missile defenses. But first he warned Americans of the dangers of embracing a nuclear freeze:

I know that many of you want peace, and so do I. I know too that many you believe that nuclear freeze would further the cause of peace. But a freeze now would make us less, and not, more secure and would raise, not reduce the risk of war.¹⁷⁰

After appealing to the American people to reject the freeze and support his strategic modernization program, Reagan laid out his vision of a world free from the danger of nuclear war. He saw a world where strategic defense would enable the United States to “save lives rather than avenge them,”¹⁷¹ a world where the scientific community would provide the means to “render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”¹⁷²

The speech was a stunning political success.¹⁷³ Reagan had personally supervised its preparation. In his memoirs, Reagan claims that he did “a lot of rewriting. Much of it was to change bureaucratese into people talk.”¹⁷⁴ In actuality, Reagan displayed his mastery of political imagery by inserting the speeches most memorable phrases. He insisted of inclusion of Watson’s phrase about “saving lives” and personally added his vision of making “nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Televised address, 23 March 1983, *Public Papers of the President: Ronald Reagan, 1983* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 439-443.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Polls showed that seventy-five percent of the American people supported the President’s initiative. D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 190.

¹⁷⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, 571.

¹⁷⁵ D’Souza, *Ronald Reagan*, 250.

The demise of the freeze movement can be traced almost directly to Reagan's 23 March 1983 speech. Before the speech, the nuclear freeze had been the primary vehicle for political discussion about nuclear weapons. The Strategic Defense Initiative allowed the President to regain command of the language of the debate and dilute the urgency of the anti-nuclear movement. In fact, the freeze movement made opposing SDI a major thrust of its campaign, abandoning its simplistic message for politically benign technical arguments concerning "counter-force."¹⁷⁶

As a result of SDI, the political climate surrounding defense policy had changed almost instantly and so did congressional attitudes toward the Reagan defense program. In 1983, the House passed a diluted, meaningless freeze resolution, after which congressional discussion of the freeze all but disappeared. Reagan's strategic modernization program was approved, if sometimes narrowly, by the Congress. Missile defense, while controversial, became a firmly established element of the U.S. defense budget.¹⁷⁷

Making SDI a cornerstone of the 1984 Republican election campaign, Reagan co-opted the peace issue from his opponents. In the 1984 presidential election, he defeated pro-freeze candidate Walter Mondale by a landslide, dashing the Freeze Campaign's hope of influencing the election. The Freeze Campaign had been thoroughly neutralized as a force in American politics.

¹⁷⁶ For example, see Marta Daniels, "Stopping Star Wars: The Sky's Not The Limit," *Peace Work* (June 1984).

¹⁷⁷ Meyer, *Winter of Discontent*, 271.

E. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND SDI

Competing myths and images were decisive in the rise and fall of the national Freeze Campaign and the emergence of the Strategic Defense Initiative. The fact that SDI will forever be synonymous with “Star Wars” is illustrative. Congressional critics used the term “Star Wars” to communicate to the American people that missile defense was “appalling and ridiculous idea.”¹⁷⁸ Reagan believed the public would see it differently. He pointed out to his advisors that “Star Wars” reminded Americans of one their favorite movies—one in which the forces of good prevailed over the forces of an evil empire.¹⁷⁹ Eight years later, observing America’s defensive Patriot missiles intercepting Iraq’s offensive Scuds, the *Los Angeles Times* would announce the dawn of the “Age of Star Wars.”¹⁸⁰

Underlying the nuclear freeze debate were contradictory beliefs about the relationship between nuclear weapons and American national security. Reagan believed that a nuclear peace could only be achieved by modernizing American strategic forces in order to “assure that we would regain and sustain military superiority over the Soviet Union.”¹⁸¹ Freeze activists and their congressional supporters believed that a military buildup would only pull the “nuclear tripwire tighter,” possibly sending the United States over the brink to nuclear war.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Larry Pressler, *Star Wars: The SDI Debate in Congress* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 67.

¹⁷⁹ D’Sousa, *Ronald Reagan*, 177.

¹⁸⁰ Melissa Haley, “High-Tech Missile Hits Bull’s-Eye,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 1991, 1.

¹⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 294.

¹⁸² Randall Fosberg, *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race: Proposal for a Mutual US-Soviet Nuclear Weapons Freeze*, April 1982, 2.

The preeminence of Presidential myth making. President Reagan, by virtue of his position and persuasive ability, proved to be the nation's most powerful myth maker. He masterfully crafted his announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to alleviate the public fears that were driving the opposition to his nuclear program. The nuclear freeze, however, was facilitated by the Administration's casual and cavalier statements concerning the prospects of nuclear war. This afforded other national elites the political opportunity to manipulate powerful images of nuclear war to frame the terms of debate and shape public and congressional opinion in favor the nuclear freeze. SDI, however successful, was a reactive strategy necessitated by President Reagan's early failure to command the terms of the strategic debate.

Political imagery was important tool used by national elites to garner support for both the nuclear freeze and SDI proposals. After the demise of the Freeze Campaign, its leaders would complain that "President Reagan simply manipulated the [anti-nuclear] feeling once it had surfaced, using his greatest weapons: the media."¹⁸³ In truth, calls for a nuclear freeze and strategic defenses both manipulated powerful emotion-laden images to perpetuate myths of strikingly simplistic solutions to the nuclear paradox. Randall Fosberg and other freeze activists drew vivid images of their audiences' towns and cities being vaporized by nuclear weapons and argued that the freeze would "lessen the risk of nuclear war."¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Reagan compelled the public to imagine a world where strategic defenses offered the hope "that our children and grandchildren could live in a world free of the constant threat of

¹⁸³ Kehler, "Message From National Coordinator," 3.

¹⁸⁴ Fosberg quoted in Leavitt, *Freezing the Arms Race*, 12.

nuclear war.”¹⁸⁵ The key difference was that Reagan’s vision tapped into America’s deeply held anticommunist and technological heritage by compelling the public and political elites to imagine defeating the “evil empire” with American gadgetry that would “render nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, SDI had a more powerful appeal, because unlike the freeze, it captured the American ethos of optimism, self-reliance, technical innovation, and manifest destiny.¹⁸⁷

Exploiting the nexus between the media and the public, influential elites shaped congressional attitudes toward the freeze and SDI. History has shown that the American public favors the simultaneous pursuit of both strength and peace in U.S. foreign and defense policy.¹⁸⁸ Current events—like the Iran Hostage Crisis, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and Three Mile Island—allowed the freeze movement to focus public attention on Reagan’s perceived pursuit of strength at the expense of peace. Stoking public fears of nuclear war, freeze activists and congressional doves fostered an intense anti-nuclear national political climate. In turn, the Freeze movement came to represent widespread opposition to the newly elected President’s defense policies. Congressional attitudes quickly began to reflect public sentiments. The Administration noticed a growing congressional opposition to its defense proposals and began to fear that the freeze movement would undermine its defense program

¹⁸⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, 550.

¹⁸⁶ Vlahos, *Strategic Defense and the American Ethos*, 15.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ William Schneider, “‘Rambo’ and Reality: Having it Both Ways,” in Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Eagle Resurgent? The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987): 452-475.

all together. President Reagan reacted with the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to sooth the public anxieties that were fueling the opposition to his defense policies. Framing his initiatives as a method to peacefully reduce the danger of nuclear war, Reagan altered the political climate, neutralized the freeze movement, and shifted the balance of public and congressional opinion back in favor of his desired defense policies.

IV. PATRIOT GAMES: GULF WAR LESSONS

During the buildup to Operation Desert Storm, public anxiety escalated as some pundits predicted thousands of casualties for American forces.¹⁸⁹ Although President Bush enjoyed substantial public support for the war, political tensions peaked as he ordered the beginning of hostilities.¹⁹⁰ Within twenty-four hours of the beginning of coalition air strikes on Iraqi positions, Saddam Hussein unleashed his potentially most devastating weapons: Scud missiles.¹⁹¹ Hussein might have assumed that these missiles could inflict American and Israeli casualties, provoke an Israeli reaction, create public outrage, undermine coalition resolve, and force the United States to beg for peace. The ensuing battle in the skies was broadcast live into every American living room. Night after night, the American people were mesmerized as they watched Patriot missiles streak into the skies to knock down the Iraqi Scuds launched at Israel and Saudi Arabia.

As America's overwhelming technological and military supremacy became apparent, public anxiety gave way to relief, relief to jubilation, and jubilation to euphoria.¹⁹² Patriot's success came to represent confidence in America's renewed military prowess. Philip Taylor, in his history of *War and the Media*, illustrates the power of the Patriot phenomenon:

¹⁸⁹ Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), 70.

¹⁹⁰ John Mueller, "American Public Opinion and the Gulf War," in *The Political Psychology of the Gulf War*, ed. Stanley A. Renshon (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 199-226.

¹⁹¹ Robert M. Stein, "Patriot Experience in the Gulf War," *International Security* 16, no. 1 (Summer 1992):199.

¹⁹² Mueller, 204.

on streets all across the country.¹⁹⁴ The powerful public images of Patriot's success reached deeply in to American popular culture.

How did the powerful images of the Gulf War influence the debate over the development and deployment of anti-ballistic missile systems? The debate over Patriot's performance in the Gulf was not grounded in concerns about the effectiveness or necessity of theater missile defenses in the post-Cold War international environment. On the contrary, the argument was quickly framed in terms of the competing Cold War paradigms. Patriot's political story is one full of savvy, irony, and manipulation. Despite considerable evidence that its success was vastly oversold, Patriot's persona captured the American imagination, empowered political elites, and dramatically influenced both the nature and level of missile defense funding in the 1990s. The Patriot debate illustrates how key players utilize powerful images to reinforce strategic myths and manipulate public policy.

This chapter examines the role of myths and images in shaping the debate over Patriot's performance in the Gulf. Section A examines how the images of Patriot's success were used to rekindle the debate over strategic defenses. Section B describes the Left's response to the push for increased SDI funding. Section C explains how the images of Patriot ultimately influenced both the character and level of missile defense funding. Finally, section D outlines the implications of Patriot experience for future missile defense debates.

¹⁹⁴ Kenneth Labich, "America's Arsenal; No Scudbuster T-Shirts Here," *Time*, 25 February 1991, 60.

A. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK: PATRIOT REKINDLES THE SDI DEBATE

For over a decade after President Reagan announced his 1983 initiative to render nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete,” congressional Doves had succeeded in curtailing SDI funding and preventing any efforts to deploy a missile defense system.¹⁹⁵ They had been generally successful at portraying SDI (“Star Wars”) as a “boondoggle in the sky” and “a budget busting fantasy.”¹⁹⁶ Additionally, President Bush’s unenthusiastic support for strategic defenses had facilitated a forty percent reduction in funding for SDI research during his first two years in office.¹⁹⁷ In fact—as Doves would continually point out—Patriot was not a part of SDI, having been originally designed as a defense against enemy aircraft not missiles.¹⁹⁸ Hawks saw Patriot’s success in the Gulf as an opportunity to reverse a decade of setbacks and forge ahead with developing and deploying missile defenses.¹⁹⁹

In the wake of the Gulf War, missile defense advocates argued that the experience had refuted several assertions championed by those opposing missile defenses—namely that deterrence is better than defense, that defending against missile attack is technically

¹⁹⁵ Pat Towell, “Democrats Are Trying To Move On In Hopes of Redefining Their Stance,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 23 March 1991, 754-755. For a description of the “center-left coalition” that restrained SDI see Pat Towell, “Bush Carries On Fight for SDI, But Space Weapons in Doubt,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 6 July 1991, 1836.

¹⁹⁶ For a classic rendition of the dove’s recurring argument against SDI see the floor speech, “Boondoggle in the Sky,” by Congressman Ron Klink of Pennsylvania, *U.S. Congressional Record*, 15 February 1995, H387.

¹⁹⁷ Kenneth J. Garcia, “Star Wars Making a Comeback Conservatives Push to Revive Space-Based Defense System,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 December, 1995, A1.

¹⁹⁸ This argument is clearly articulated by Leslie H. Gelb, “Right-Wing Myths,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1991, Section 4, 17.

¹⁹⁹ Union of Concerned Scientists, *SDI’s “New Look:” Same Old Star Wars*, 7 March 1994, 4.

infeasible, and that less-than-perfect (leak-proof) defenses are useless.²⁰⁰ First, they argued that despite the overwhelming military superiority of coalition forces and the omnipresence of both the U.S. and Israeli nuclear arsenals, Saddam Hussein was not deterred from launching Scud missiles at Saudi Arabia and Israel.²⁰¹ Consequently, deterrence is unreliable, especially against leaders who may have different cultural conceptions of deterrence that are misunderstood by opposing leaders. Second, Patriot's success proved that missile defenses are technically possible and that limited defenses can provide substantial protection to civilian and military personnel.²⁰² Missile defense advocates compelled the public to imagine a Gulf War without missile defenses the Patriot; a war where every missile could inflict deadly consequences similar or worse than those of the Dhahran barracks tragedy. At Dhahran, a single Iraqi Scud killed twenty-nine American soldiers, the largest single loss of American lives in the Persian Gulf War.

Understanding that images of the Gulf War powerfully reinforced their arguments, Hawks rapidly propelled them into the public arena. Within days of the first broadcast images of the Scud wars over Saudi Arabia and Israel, missile defense advocates fired their first salvos on the editorial pages of several major American newspapers.²⁰³ They skillfully

²⁰⁰ Thomas G. Mahnken, "Lessons of the Gulf Missile War," *Washington Post*, 29 January 1991, A19.

²⁰¹ For a most complete explanation of the hawk's argument concerning the lessons of the Gulf war see Keith B. Payne, *Missile Defense in the Twenty First Century: Protection Against limited Threats* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 139-152.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Analyzing the editorial pages of the New York Times, Washington Post, Washington Times, and Wall Street Journal between January 18, 1991 and February 15, 1991, one finds eleven editorials citing Patriot as reinforcement of the "need" for SDI.

seized popular images in an attempt to reinvigorate the strategic debate and tilt the political balance in favor of deploying missile defenses. Conservative columnist Patrick Buchanan typified the argument for missile defenses when he wrote, "using SDI technology, the United States has now shown it can attack and kill ballistic missiles...The SDI debate is over."²⁰⁴ Similarly, the editors of *The Washington Times* argued that "the Patriot's success has inspired demands that Congress devote more spending to SDI and has confirmed the wisdom of those who point out that nations that fail to adopt state-of-the-art defense technologies [SDI] often fall victim to nations that have."²⁰⁵

Twelve days after the first Patriot-Scud dual in the skies the conservative rhetoric manifested itself in a policy initiative. In his January 29, 1991, State of the Union address President George Bush called for higher missile defense funding. SDI would be reinvented as Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS). He stated:

Now, with remarkable technological advances like the Patriot missile, we can defend against ballistic missile attacks aimed at innocent civilians. Looking forward, I have directed that the SDI program be refocused on providing protection from limited ballistic missile strikes, whatever their source.²⁰⁶

Although some conservatives argue that the initiative was planned prior to the Gulf War, the administration's attempt to use the images of the Gulf War to bolster political support for GPALS is indisputable.²⁰⁷ Vice President Quayle argued that "the world learned

²⁰⁴ Patrick Buchanan, "Evidence of SDI's Potential," *Washington Times*, 23 January 1991, p.G2.

²⁰⁵ Editorial Desk, "Patriots in the Desert," *Washington Times*, 19 January 1991, A2.

²⁰⁶ President George Bush, "Text of the State of the Union Address," *Washington Post*, 30 January 1991, p. A14.

²⁰⁷ For an argument that GPALS was not an attempt to capitalize on Patriot's success see Payne, 61-62.

an important lesson from the war. A missile can intercept another missile, and...ballistic missile defense does work."²⁰⁸ Similarly, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney claimed that "you cannot watch the Scuds fly at Tel Aviv and Riyadh and not be concerned that we have to have a way to develop the capacity and field the capacity to deal with ballistic missiles."²⁰⁹

Without the overwhelming success of American forces in the Gulf, the Patriot phenomenon, and the President's unprecedented approval ratings, the administration might not have been willing to expend any political capital to reopen the ABM debate. Patriot had clearly become the messiah of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Missile defense advocates believed that President Bush's support, combined with the opposition's political vulnerability due to their nearly unanimous opposition to the war, would enable them to exploit Patriot as a fulfilled prophesy of strategic defense theology.²¹⁰ Their dream of deploying space-based missile defenses seemed secure.

B. THE REVENGE OF THE NERDS!: SCIENTISTS CHALLENGE PATRIOT

Caught in the euphoria over Patriot's seeming success in the Gulf, missile defense opponents scrambled to shape a response to the renewed calls for strategic defenses. Despite the looming shadow of their opposition to the Gulf War hanging in the political balance, they

²⁰⁸ Pat Towell, "SDI Opponents say Bush's Rhetoric Doesn't Jibe With Spending Request," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 18 May 1991, 1294.

²⁰⁹ Pat Towell, "A New Rationale for SDI," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 9 February 1991, 76.

²¹⁰ The opposition to strategic defenses (mostly Democrats who had also opposed the Gulf War) were seen as extremely vulnerable in the aftermath of the war. See Carroll J. Doherty and Pat Towell, "Democrats Try To Bury Image of Foreign Policy Weakness," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 23 March 1991, 752-759; and Mueller, "American Public Opinion and the Gulf War," 212.

mustered incredible savvy, flexibility, and resilience in their opposition to GPALS. The broadcast images of Patriot defeating Scud after Scud seemed irrefutable at the time. Consequently, missile defense opponents would have to be tenacious and clever to resist the tidal wave of support for missile defenses.

Congressman Charles Bennett opened the counter offensive by editorializing that "SDI is no Patriot."²¹¹ Bennett acknowledged that "we can all be proud of the Patriot system . . . a proven battlefield weapon."²¹² However, he immediately berated those who were trying to "piggy-back their own pet programs [GPALS] on the back of this success story as sadly misinformed." The crux of his argument, which was subsequently echoed in several other editorials, was that Patriot was never part of SDI. Bennett asserted that, in fact, the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) had consistently rejected efforts to invest in defenses designed to counter tactical missiles like the Scuds that threatened U.S. forces in the Gulf. Moreover, he argued Patriot's success at shooting down rudimentary Scuds does not translate into an ability to engage high technology intercontinental ballistic missiles that have multiple warheads and travel five times as fast.²¹³ Most important, tactical missile defenses, like Patriot, do not violate the ABM treaty which recognizes the "still valid premise" that erecting a shield against nuclear attack would only prompt the other side to build more missiles to penetrate such defenses. Finally, he pointed out that the cost of Patriot and other theater defenses, although not cheap, would be peanuts compared to the cost of deploying SDI.

²¹¹ Charles E. Bennett, "SDI is No Patriot," *New York Times*, 5 February 1991, A19.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

Bennett's arguments reflected the Dove's initial strategy to simply deny Patriot's relevance to the debate over strategic defenses. Patriot's success in the Gulf could not resolve the compelling reasons to resist deploying strategic defenses; technical infeasibility, unjustifiable costs, and potential of for destabilizing nuclear. Leslie Gelb, in his *New York Times* editorial, "Right-Wing Myths," puts it succinctly:

Patriot and Star Wars are both designed to intercept missiles. But the similarity ends there. It's like saying that since people and elephants both have ears they can equally enjoy Mozart, and the elephants should be encouraged to do so.²¹⁴

To the Dove's dismay, denying Patriot's relevance and reiterating the technocratic arguments against strategic defenses, however eloquent, could scarcely compete with masterful exploitation Gulf War images by strategic defense advocates. For example, Senator Jon Kyl, a long time SDI supporter, perfected the art:

The contrast could not be clearer: First, television footage of Israelis in gas masks carefully sifting through the rubble of Iraqi Scud attacks on Tel Aviv the night before. Then, live pictures of a U.S. Patriot missile streaking skyward to score a direct hit on an Iraqi Scud. With these TV images, Americans have vivid evidence of why ballistic missile defense is important, as well as how effective it can be.²¹⁵

While the arguments against missile defense remained abstract, Hawks used the television images of Patriot to turn abstraction into reality. Feeling politically vulnerable, many staunchly anti-SDI Democrats, including Senator Edward Kennedy, began to cave in on missile defense issues by offering to support some increases in SDI funding.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Gelb, "Right-Wing Myths," 17.

²¹⁵ Jon Kyl, "Why Missile Defense is Important," *Washington Times*, 28 January 1991, G4.

²¹⁶ George Archibald, "Patriot Zaps Foes of 'Star Wars' on the Hill," *Washington Times*, 31 January 1991, B8.

Congressional support for GPALS was gathering considerable momentum. If ABM opponents were going to have any success at defeating the proposal, they would have to change their tactics.

Washington Post columnist Mark Gubrud was the first ABM opponent to clearly articulate an understanding of the political implications of Patriot's success in Gulf War. In responding to an pro-SDI editorial he asserted:

that the Patriot success story has led the most casual observers to the conclusion that the development of missile defenses (meaning SDI) is indeed both feasible and prudent. He is right, and that is why it is so important to correct the public perception of Patriot's performance in Gulf.²¹⁷

Having come to understand that the images of Patriot were more politically palatable than theological arguments concerning the danger of SDI, Doves no longer praised Patriot as a battlefield success. Instead, they attempted to undermine Patriot's image.

Leading the anti-Patriot charge was Theodore Postol, a prominent defense analyst from the Center of International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee on 16 April 1991, Postol argued that "Patriot's reputation was more myth than reality."²¹⁸

During the period of the Patriot defense there were 15 fewer Scud attacks [on Israel] relative to the period when there was no defense. Yet the number of apartments reported damaged almost tripled, and the number of injuries from attacks increased by more than 50 percent.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Mark A. Gubrud, "SDI Will Lead Us to War," *Washington Post*, 3 May 1991, A24.

²¹⁸ Carroll J. Doherty, "Some Doubts Raised About the Patriot," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 20 April 1991, 1002.

²¹⁹ Ibid. For Postol's complete technical analysis of Patriot's performance see "The Lessons of the Gulf War Patriot Experience," *International Security* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1991/92): 119-171. For a rebuttal of Postol's argument, see Stein, "Patriot Experience in the Gulf War," 199-225.

Postol's charges were stunning. He argued not just that Patriot was ineffective but also that Israel may have been better off if Patriot had stayed home.²²⁰

Despite widespread debate over Patriot's performance in the Gulf and the confirmation by the Department of Defense of some of Postol's conclusions, the attempt to undermine Patriot's powerful first impressions failed to get any traction with the public or to alter significantly the course of the congressional debate over missile defenses.²²¹ At the end of April, there was a widespread expectation among congressional leaders that the momentum from Patriot's success would lead to the approval of much of the GPALS initiative. However, the missile defense opponents unveiled one last political tactic to undermine space-based systems which were at the heart of the GPALS proposal.

C. SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY: DOVES CUT A DEAL

In order to block complete approval of GPALS, staunch missile defense opponents temporarily conceded their opposition to theater missile defenses:

Like a judo wrestler turning an opponent's strength to his own advantage, House Democrats have used President Bush's most politically resonant argument for the Strategic Defense Initiative against him.²²²

²²⁰ Eliot Marshal, "Patriot's Scud Busting Record is Challenged," *Science* 252, no. 5006 (3 May 1991): 640.

²²¹ For details of the Patriot debate see Eric Schmidt, "U.S. Details Flaw in the Patriot Missile," *New York Times*, 6 June 1991, A9; Patrick E. Tyler, "Did Patriot Work? Not So Well, Scientists Say," *New York Times*, 17 April 1991, A11; Eric Schmidt, "Missile's War Record Revised," *New York Times*, 8 April 1992, A11; David Hughes, "Success of Patriot System Shapes Debate on Future Antimissile Weapons," *Aviation Week and Space Technology* 134, no. 16 (22 April 1991): 90. For a brief explanation of the enduring images of the Gulf War, see Tim Weiner, "Stealth, Lies, and Videotape," *New York Times*, 14 July 1996, A24.

²²² Pat Towell, "SDI Opponents Say Bush's Rhetoric Doesn't Jibe with Spending Request," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 18 May 1991, 1294.

In an ironic twist, Doves neutralized conservative efforts to capitalize on Patriot's success by returning to their original argument that Patriot "is the kind of practical, workable anti-missile system we should be producing."²²³ Their characterizations of Patriot had come full circle. Allying themselves with prominent centrist defense experts, including House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, Doves were able to kill plans for deploying the space-based missile defenses that had constituted the heart of SDI.²²⁴ Every time conservatives invoked Patriot's success to bolster their argument for strategic defenses, Doves underscored their support for Patriot-like land-based systems.²²⁵ The ABM opponent's alliance with the congressional moderates, however, had unintended consequences.

Although most Doves could reluctantly accept theater missile defenses, a vast majority were opposed to any form of national missile defenses because of their "destabilizing effect" on U.S.-Russian relations and their belief that missile defense would bring United States closer to a nuclear confrontation. Consequently, they were severely disappointed when Senator Nunn editorialized his support for a national missile defense:

As a result of the Gulf War, a strong consensus has developed in support of building missile interceptors superiors to the Patriots for defending our allies and U.S. forces deployed in regional conflicts. I support this effort. But why should Tel Aviv or Riyadh be entitled to protection Atlanta or New York City don't have?²²⁶

²²³ Bennett, "SDI is No Patriot," A19.

²²⁴ Towell, "SDI Opponents Say Bush's Rhetoric Doesn't Jibe with Spending Request," 1295.

²²⁵ Pat Towell, "Compromise on SDI Needed, GOP Senators Tell Bush," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 15 June 1991, 1604.

²²⁶ Sam Nunn, "Still Needed: ABM Defense," *New York Times*, 31 July 1991, A19.

Having coopted both sides of the issue, Nunn and Aspin had staked out a centrist position which they believed would preserve strategic stability as well as secure a defense for American cities. The powerful images of the Gulf War and Patriot were instrumental in forging that consensus.

D. MYTHS, IMAGES, AND PATRIOT GAMES

Underlying the Patriot debate were conflicting beliefs about the strategic utility of missile defenses. This Cold War baggage continues to pervade the ABM debate and inhibits a separate discussion of TMD. The Gulf War illustrated the practical need for U.S. forces to defend against theater missiles. The Patriot debate, however, was quickly framed in terms of outdated Cold War paradigms.

After the intense Patriot debate of the spring, in November of 1991, Congress quietly approved the deployment of a new anti-missile system for the first time in a quarter century. The planned call for increased for a twenty-five percent increase in funding for theater and land-based national missile defenses to be deployed by 1996. The proposal, however, limited funding for the space-based defenses that are dear to the hearts of missile defense advocates.

Images of Patriot missiles streaking into the skies to knock down Iraq's Scuds were a powerful public demonstration of the promise and possibility of missile defense. There is little doubt that images played a decisive role in the shaping congressional attitudes toward the new ABM legislation. Maj. Gen Malcolm R. O'Niel, director of SDIO at the time, explained that "the Gulf War left an indelible mark on the majority of the minds of

Congress.”²²⁷ The *New York Times* claimed that:

Washington’s decision [to deploy an ABM system] is said by many analyst to have resulted in large part from the Persian Gulf War. The televised spectacle of Saddam Hussein’s missiles raining down on Israel and allied troops, and Patriot interceptors flashing up to meet them, instantly turned abstraction into reality.²²⁸

Consequently, future attempts to undermine missile defense efforts by discrediting Patriot’s powerful first impression are unlikely to succeed, especially when the arguments are strictly technical and lack powerful images to back them up.

The Patriot debate demonstrates that strategic debates are never completely resolved, nor are the results explicit. Patriot’s role in the Gulf War allowed conservative defense policy elites to forge a widespread political consensus favoring development of theater missile defense systems. The Patriot experience, however, did not translate into long-term congressional support for development, let alone deployment, of a national missile defense capability. In 1992, newly elected President Bill Clinton would kill the national missile defense initiative and restructure the missile defense program to focus almost exclusively on theater missile defense systems. President Clinton’s defense program limited the NMD program to research only, and set the stage for another missile defense controversy with the election of a Republican Congress in 1994.

²²⁷ William J. Broad, "Congress Quietly Approves Anti-Missile Plan," *New York Times*, 18 November 1991, A1.

²²⁸ Ibid.

V. STRATEGIC MYTHS, NAVAL IMAGES, AND NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE FROM THE SEA

Election of a Republican Congress in 1994 shifted the balance of congressional opinion in favor of national missile defenses (NMD). However, post-Cold War public ambivalence on defense issues enabled the Clinton administration—which is filled with officials who believe missile defenses are destabilizing—to block congressional missile defense initiatives with political impunity. Low national anxiety denied Republicans the opportunity to frame the terms of the debate and foster a political climate favorable to their preferred missile defense policies. Lacking salient images to legitimize and popularize their arguments for national missile defenses, Republican leaders turned to another method of deploying an NMD capability. Recognizing the dubious distinction between Navy theater and national missile defense capabilities, the Congress began to steadily “plus up” funding for Navy missile defense. Thus, the pursuit of sea-based missile defense capability has thrust the U.S. Navy into one of the most heated defense controversies of the past three decades: the dispute over the desirability of erecting ballistic missile defenses.

This chapter explores the congressional motives underlying increased Navy missile defense funding and suggests implications of the previous ABM debates for the future of *National Missile Defense (NMD) From the Sea*. Section A describes the 1995 NMD controversy and the emergence of the *NMD From the Sea* concept. Section B examines the failed attempt by conservative activists to manipulate naval images to reinforce their belief in national missile defense. Section C characterizes the hostile political waters the Navy must fair if it prematurely pursues Naval NMD. Section D outlines the inherent political

advantages of sea-based missile defense that might be exploited in the future. Section E explores the unresolved questions surrounding sea-based missile defenses that require further research. Section F summarizes the overall conclusions and recommendations of this thesis.

A. THE NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE CONTROVERSY

The rebirth of the national missile defense issue began when conservative activists—most notably the Heritage Foundation and the Center for Security Policy—convinced Republican leaders to insert a missile defense proposal into the 1994 Contract with America.²²⁹ The contract pledged to deploy “at the earliest possible date a cost-effective, operational antiballistic missile defense system to protect the United States against ballistic missiles.”²³⁰ After winning majorities in both the House and Senate, Republicans were intent on honoring their promise. Republicans made missile defense a central theme of their defense plan, passing a provision to the Defense Authorization Act mandating deployment by the year 2003 of a National Missile Defense system capable of defending all fifty states.²³¹ On 28 December 1995, President Clinton vetoed the 265 billion-dollar defense bill citing his strong objection to the National Missile Defense language.²³²

²²⁹ Joseph Cirincione, “Why the Right Lost the Missile Defense Debate,” *Foreign Policy* 106 (Spring 1997): 37-54. Full text available at www.stimson.org.

²³⁰ Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey, et. al., *Contract With America* (New York: Random House, 1994), 107.

²³¹ Brian Green, “The Clash on National Missile Defense,” *Air Force Magazine* (March 1996): 8.

²³² *Ibid.*

Underlying the divisive political struggle over the 1996 Defense Authorization Act were differences in beliefs about the desirability of strategic defenses. Conservatives believed that defending American cities should be America's top defense priority. In contrast, administration officials and congressional doves believed that deploying missile defenses would undermine arms control rendering the United States less secure.

Backed by General Shalikashvili, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President justified his veto of the Republicans' defense proposal. "By setting U.S. policy on a collision course with the ABM treaty," Clinton explained, "the bill would jeopardize continued Russian implementation of START I as well as Russian ratification of the START II Treaty."²³³ Officials in the Administration believed that mandating the deployment of dubious missile defenses would inhibit the destruction of thousands of Russian warheads.

Fueling the administration's concerns was the Russian parliament's failure to ratify the START II agreement which required them to reduce their delivery capability from 8,000 to 3,500 strategic nuclear warheads. Peter Zimmerman, former advisor to the International Security and Arms Control Agency asserts:

why should we trash an agreement that would remove 8,000 warheads pointed at us so that we can defend against countries without any capability of reaching us with a nuclear missile. As far as I know, any Russian warhead we get chopped up and destroyed is one that we have defended against perfectly.²³⁴

President Clinton's argument against deployment of NMD was bolstered by a recent national

²³³ Pat Towell, "Leaders Pursue Compromise As Override Vote Fails," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review* (6 January 1996): 61.

²³⁴ Kenneth J. Garcia, "Star Wars Making a Comeback Conservatives Push to Revive Space-Based Defense System," A1.

intelligence estimate.²³⁵ Although the estimate is secret, Richard N. Cooper, chairman of the National Intelligence Council, summarized the document in a letter to House National Security Committee. He stated that U.S. intelligence agencies have determined that an attack by Russian or Chinese strategic forces is unlikely.²³⁶ Moreover, the report claimed that hostile countries, like North Korea and Iran, would be unable to acquire long-range ballistic missile technology for an estimated ten to fifteen years and that the missile technology control agreement had “significantly limited international transfer of missiles components and related technologies.”²³⁷

These arguments against NMD were challenged on all grounds by the Republican Congress. Senator Trent Lott (R-Miss.) argued that committing to the deployment of national missile defense would not affect arms control agreements. Lott claimed that “if Russia does not ratify START II it may be because of the Communists and Nationalists who were just elected to their parliamentary body, not because of this missile defense language.”²³⁸ Furthermore, the bill’s proponents pointed out that some national missile defenses are allowed under the 1972 ABM Treaty.²³⁹

Republicans also challenged the administration’s threat estimate. Noting recent Chinese missile threats against Taiwan and the United States, the advancing North Korean

²³⁵ Pat Towell, “GOP, Democrats Cross Swords Over Anti-Missile Systems,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review* (2 March 1996): 564.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Green, “The Clash on National Missile Defense,” 9.

²³⁹ Pat Towell, “Dole, Gingrich Push Anti-Missile Plan,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review* (23 March 1995): 808.

ballistic missile program, and the uncontrolled spread of Russian missile technology, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) prophesied "an existing and expanding threat to the United States from ballistic missiles." Thurmond cited testimony by a former CIA director, William O. Studeman who stated that a new Korean ballistic missile could easily be operational by the end of the decade.²⁴⁰

Republicans discounted the effectiveness of the agreement limiting missile technology exports. Congressman Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) explained that the recent interception of Soviet made high technology missile guidance equipment on its way to Iraq, suggests that the Russians are either "unwilling or unable to comply with the agreement."²⁴¹

Just prior to the President's veto, the NMD debate achieved new intensity. On December 21, 1996, Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Sen. William Cohen (R-Maine), men long respected for their ability to forge bipartisan compromise on strategic issues, openly quarreled on the floor of the Senate. "There is no need for . . . ironclad commitments today to deploy by a date certain a defense that is clearly an anticipatory breach of the ABM Treaty," Nunn declared.²⁴² Chastising Nunn, Cohen rebutted, "the fact of the matter is that the Administration is opposed to deployment of any system of any kind to defend the American people."²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Towell, "GOP, Democrats Cross Swords Over Anti-Missile Systems," 564.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 562.

²⁴² Pat Towell, "Veto Likely Over Missile Policy," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review* (23 December 1995): 3898.

²⁴³ Ibid.

In 1991, Cohen and Nunn had forged a congressional consensus for deploying a land-based NMD capability. This dispute between the “cerebral centrists” demonstrated that the middle ground on missile defense had evaporated. A Presidential veto was imminent. Unable to muster the votes to override the President’s veto and trapped by their previous approval of the defense appropriations bill, the Republicans were forced to remove the language mandating the deployment of National Missile Defense.²⁴⁴

Lacking salient images to legitimize and popularize their arguments for national missile defenses, Republican leaders turned to another method of deploying an NMD capability. Recognizing the dubious distinction between Navy theater and national missile defense capabilities, the Congress began to “plus up” funding for Navy theater missile defense programs. Representative Curt Weldon would later bluntly explain the motive behind the increased funding:

We have funded that system to a higher level, again in line with what the Navy says they need to move aggressively, to see whether or not Navy upper tier offer us the potential well beyond protecting a fleet of ships, perhaps even becoming eventually a national missile defense system.²⁴⁵

In essence, conservatives believed that deploying a sea-based missile defense would in effect “provide a national missile defense capability through the back door.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Pat Towell, “Anti-Missile Defense Mandate Dropped on Bow to Clinton,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review* (20 January 1996): 154.

²⁴⁵ *Congressional Record*, 18 June 1997, H3901

²⁴⁶ Interview with House of Representatives professional staff, 9 September 1997.

B. THE MISSING NEXUS: POWERFUL IMAGES & PERCEPTIONS

Angered by the Presidential veto and citing polls identifying potential “public outrage” over the neglect of missile defense, Republican strategists advocated making NMD a 1996 campaign issue.²⁴⁷ A key architect of the missile defense campaign was former Reagan deputy assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Gaffney. In April 1996, the *Wall Street Journal* explained that “by tirelessly pushing results of polls and studies of focus groups, he [Gaffney] has convinced Republican leaders that backing national missile defense can be a winning issue in the fall.”²⁴⁸

Gaffney realized, however, that the missile defense issue lacked political salience because the American public did not feel threatened by ballistic missiles.²⁴⁹ To correct the problem, he contemplated a media strategy designed to connect the voter to images of a missile threat and the Republican solution. First, a commercial was developed showing a rogue dictator launching a ballistic missile at the United States, followed by a scene of an American General informing the President that the military could do nothing to stop the missile. Second, missile defense advocates tried to convince Bob Dole to embrace the concept of sea-based national missile defenses. They envisioned him standing on the deck of a destroyer proclaiming that Aegis ships offered a cost-effective solution for defending American cities, a solution the President had neglected because of his outdated Cold War

²⁴⁷ Pat Towell, “Dole, Gingrich Push Anti-Missile Plan,” 808.

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Cirincione, “Why the Right Lost,” www.stimson.org.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Frank Gaffney, Director, Center for Security Policy, 9 September 1997.

thinking.²⁵⁰ Dole rejected this idea because of his reluctance to manipulate active duty military forces for political purposes and never funded the widespread airing of the missile defense commercial.²⁵¹ Instead, Dole chose a strictly verbal campaign promising that “on my first day in office, I will set America on a course that will end our vulnerability to missile attack.”²⁵² Democrats promptly responded with images, characterizing the “Dole-Gingrich NMD plan as an attempt to resurrect Star Wars.”²⁵³ Figure 5-1 is an R.J. Matson editorial cartoon portraying the “The Return of Star Wars” as a budget-busting fantasy.



Figure 5-1: The Return of Star Wars (Roll Call and R.J. Matson, copyright 1996)

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Cirincione, “Why the Right Lost,” www.stimson.org.

²⁵³ White House Fact Sheet, *National Missile Defense, Theater Missile Defense & The ABM Treaty*, 22 May 1996.

Liberal columnists attacked Dole asserting that "any candidate who claims to be for lower deficits, but votes for Star Wars has some serious explaining to do."²⁵⁴ The Clinton Presidential campaign also responded to the Dole NMD initiative. Democratic members of Congress and independent analysts "worked closely with the administration to help frame the terms of the debate."²⁵⁵ As a result, President Clinton introduced his "responsible program for national missile defense."²⁵⁶ Clinton pledged to develop the NMD technology in three years, and then be prepared to build the initial ground-based site in three years if it is needed. This proposal, known as "3 + 3," was a clever political ploy developed by Vice President Gore's national security advisor, Leon Firth, to co-opt the missile defense issue. Firth, a long time opponent of missile defense, understood that the "3 + 3" initiative would "indefinitely delay deployment of any national missile defenses while neutralizing the subject as a campaign issue."²⁵⁷

The Clinton campaign emphasized that the Dole proposal would violate the ABM Treaty, and put at risk reductions in missiles and bombers carrying thousands of nuclear warheads. In contrast, Clinton plan would "ensure the deployment of the best possible NMD system if and when the threat emerges, preserve the ABM Treaty, and ensure the two-thirds reduction in U.S. and Russian nuclear inventories mandated by START I and II."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Jennifer Weeks, "Military Gets a Free Pass," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 22 May 1996.

²⁵⁵ Cirincione, "Why the Right Lost," 50.

²⁵⁶ White House Fact Sheet, *National Missile Defense, Theater Missile Defense & The ABM Treaty*, 22 May 1996.

²⁵⁷ Interview with White House National Security Council staff member, 11 September 1997.

²⁵⁸ White House Fact Sheet, *National Missile Defense*, 22 May 1996.

Clinton's clever "3 + 3" initiative combined with Dole's failure to embrace a media strategy guaranteed that the claim that "Clinton's opposition to missile defense is one of the most negligent, short-sighted, irresponsible, and potentially catastrophic policies in history," would never resonate with voters. Unable to imagine the threat or a viable solution, the public remained apathetic toward missile defense. During the 1996 campaign, defense issues never made the "Top Eight" matters voters considered important.²⁵⁹ In the end, less than three in ten Americans supported Dole's proposal to defend America.²⁶⁰ Given their failure to make NMD a national issue, Republicans began to see the Navy's theater systems as an increasingly attractive option for defending American cities.

C. THE POLITICS OF NMD FROM THE SEA

Frustrated by the "3 + 3" initiative, some congressional missile defense advocates began taking the position that Clinton's ground-based NMD program should be abandoned because of its expense and lack of timeliness; instead, they argued that "we should press ahead to make the Navy Theater Wide defense all it can be."²⁶¹ They claimed that the money saved by canceling the more expensive, less effective ground-based defense would more than pay for the Navy's program.²⁶² Senator John Kyl (R-AZ) has openly articulated this position:

²⁵⁹ Bradley Graham, "Missile Defense Failing to Launch as Voting Issue," *Washington Post*, 28 July 1996; and "Voters: The Reasons Why," *National Journal*, 9 November 1996, 2408.

²⁶⁰ High Frontier, "3 + 3 = 0," *Strategic Issues Policy Brief, Number 5*, 1 July 1997, <http://www.erols.com/hifront/PolicyBrief5.HTM>

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid. Senator Kyle's office estimates the cost of Naval NMD to be \$3 billion and the CBO projects a cost of 5 billion, by far the most inexpensive NMD option currently available.

We should immediately upgrade the Navy's Aegis cruisers with long-range defensive interceptors, enabling a global defense that can protect not only America's overseas troops and allies, but also Americans at home.²⁶³

Thus, sea-based missile defense has become a cornerstone of the conservative push to defend America from missile attacks. Some NMD advocates are pressing "the naval leadership to act now to communicate the strengths of the Naval NMD Concept."²⁶⁴ They claim that the Navy "could not ask for a more favorable climate" for articulating its potential NMD solution,²⁶⁵ an assertion that must be viewed with extreme caution.

1. Hostile Political Waters

Despite claims to the contrary, a premature decision to openly pursue Navy NMD would send the naval service needlessly into hostile political waters. Continued public apathy on defense issues might allow the President to continue to undermine NMD initiatives with impunity, regardless of congressional support. The major obstacle to Naval NMD is the Administration's belief that the ABM Treaty best advances American security. The ABM Treaty expressly prohibits sea-based strategic defenses.²⁶⁶ Republican calls to abandon this "Cold War relic," have fallen on deaf ears in the administration.²⁶⁷ Even conservatives

²⁶³ Senator Jon Kyl, "OP-ED," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1997.

²⁶⁴ Jon P. Walman, "National Missile defense and the Navy's Potential Solution," *National Security Studies Quarterly* III no. 3 (Summer 1997): 35.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 35. See also "Demarcation Agreement, Political atmosphere Boost Prospects of Navy NMD," *Inside The Navy*, 2 October 1996, 3.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Kyl, "OP-ED."

acknowledge that under current political circumstances, treaty compliance is prerequisite for sustained funding of any missile defense effort.²⁶⁸

The stakes for the Navy are high. Pursuing an NMD capability could undermine support for the Aegis program all together. This possibility is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Outspoken critics have argued that Navy missile defenses have “dubious value” and are simply a Navy ploy to justify largely superfluous Aegis ships.²⁶⁹ Some of these arguments have apparently resonated in the White House. In September of this year, some Presidential advisors advocated that the President use his line item veto authority to strike some funding for the DDG-51 program.²⁷⁰ Desiring to avoid a direct fight with senate majority leader and other key congressional members the President rejected the idea.²⁷¹

Nevertheless, the White House staff’s enmity for anything amounting to national missile defense definitely played a role in their line-item veto thinking. The President cut \$30 million that would have financed research on tracking and intercepting asteroids before they collide with Earth, claiming the asteroid project is a thinly disguised effort to conduct national missile defense research.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Interview with House of Representatives and Senate professional staffs, 10 September 1997. This was the consensus of all the staffers I interviewed.

²⁶⁹ See William Odom, “Transforming the Military,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 4 (July/August 1997): 62; and John Pike, “Star Wars: Clever Politics in the Service of Bad Policy,” Issue Brief, www.stimson.org. Pike asserts that “another mission, such as carrying Upper Tier, must be found for the Navy’s cruisers and destroyers, lest either they or the aircraft carriers join the mothballed battleships.”

²⁷⁰ Interview with White House National Security Council staff member, 11 September 1997.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² John Diamond, “Clinton Trims \$144 million from Defense Spending Bill,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, 15-Oct-1997, A-8.

Despite the recognition that increased funding for Navy Upper Tier is another thinly disguised effort to deploy a national missile defense, neither the administration nor congressional doves have strongly opposed the initiative. Some Republicans in Congress "are surprised that a larger opposition to Navy missile defense has not yet developed."²⁷³ Several factors underlie the current lack of opposition to Navy missile defense. Compared to other missile defense programs, like the Army's Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), the Navy program is in its infancy. Moreover, congressional Democrats believe that any NMD capable, Navy system is unlikely to be rendered ABM treaty compliant by the Clinton's Arms Control Implementation and Compliance Office.²⁷⁴ One highly placed congressional staffer, however, warned that if Navy Upper Tier begins to make serious progress toward deployment "expect a firestorm of political opposition from the Left,"²⁷⁵ opposition the Navy is unlikely overcome unless the political circumstances change.

In some ways, the Navy's staunchest advocates may be its worst enemies.²⁷⁶ In their recent efforts, missile defense activists have displayed neither the creative knack nor the keen sense of timing necessary for successful myth making. The Navy should not succumb to pressure to develop prematurely an NMD capability. Absent a national consensus to withdraw from the ABM Treaty, the Navy should avoid openly pursuing Naval NMD.

²⁷³ Interview with Senate Armed Services Committee professional staff, 10 September 1997.

²⁷⁴ Interview with House and Senate professional staff, 10 September 1997.

²⁷⁵ Interview with White House National Security Council staff member, 11 September 1997.

²⁷⁶ Interview with John Isaacs, Executive Director, Council for Livable World, 9 September 1997.

2. Naval NMD: A Natural Defense

National Missile Defense From the Sea is an idea whose political moment has not yet arrived. A public desire for NMD, however, may come sooner than anyone thinks. Several alarming international trends—the proliferation of ballistic missiles, weapons of mass destruction, and the increasing possibility of an accidental missile launch—could lead to events that would fuel public anxieties and provide the opportunity for missile defense advocates to foster a national consensus favoring withdrawal from the ABM treaty and immediate deployment of an NMD capability. Publicity surrounding events such as the 1995 Russia full-scale nuclear alert could be decisive. President Yeltsin activated his nuclear briefcase when Russian air defenses mistook a Norwegian scientific rocket for American Trident Missile.²⁷⁷ Images of an Iranian or North Korean nuclear test or the launch of a missile against the United States or one of our allies would instantly change the political climate surrounding national missile defense.²⁷⁸

When the political opportunity arises, history has shown that key individuals can manipulate powerful images to shift the climate of public, Presidential, and congressional opinion starkly in favor of national missile defense. Considering the current conservative fixation on the *NMD From the Sea* concept and previous discussions of using Aegis ships in political efforts to foster support for missile defense, naval images are likely to play a role in future efforts to promote NMD. Naval leaders must think through how the exploitation of naval images might complement or complicate Navy program planning.

²⁷⁷ Bruce Nelan, "Nuclear Disarray," *Time*, 19 May 1996, 46.

²⁷⁸ Yvonne Bartoli, "Congressional Currents on BMD," in *Ballistic Missile Defense Issues for the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, Vir.: National Institute for Public Policy, 1994), 88.

Sea-based missile defenses have inherent domestic political advantages over other missile defense options. Deploying land-based national missile defenses evokes images of having to fight the war literally “from America’s backyards,” an unsettling idea that generated widespread protest during previous ABM debates. The American people prefer a forward defense that holds threats at arm’s length. They expect the American military to stand in harm’s way as necessary to protect American lives, property, and interests. American safety is to be secured offshore and wars are to be fought far from U.S. soil.²⁷⁹ Bringing the fight home is contrary to the American ethos. Mahan got it right when he wrote, “every danger of a military character to which the United States is exposed is best met outside her territory—at sea.”²⁸⁰ If the American public becomes anxious about emerging missile threats, then *NMD From the Sea* can provide a culturally consistent answer, allowing Americans to envision a forward missile defense that interdicts the threat “over there” and not over here. In essence, Naval NMD is a natural defense for the United States.

Naval NMD is also consistent with Americans sense of national mission, it could help the United States to promote international peace and stability.²⁸¹ Theodore Roosevelt set the twentieth century precedent when he forged a vision where “U.S. military power was used to promote world stability, and U.S. naval forces became an active instrument of

²⁷⁹ Michael Vlahos, *Strategic Defense and the American Ethos* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 98.

²⁸⁰ Captain A.T. Mahan quoted in *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations*, ed. Colonel Robert Debs Heinl, USMC (ret.) (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1966), 205.

²⁸¹ Vlahos, 11.

American mission."²⁸² During the Cold War, the U.S. sense of mission was reflected by overseas presence and extended nuclear deterrence. Naval NMD allows the American people to see the U.S. Navy as the provider of extended defense to complement extended deterrence. From international waters, for example, naval ships would be capable of defending all of Japan, North Korea, Israel, and most of Europe.²⁸³ The United States must cope with international sensitivities surrounding missile defense, but a non-committing naval missile defense is likely to be less controversial than a land-based system.²⁸⁴

Auxiliary assertions about cost and capabilities are always a factor in bolstering arguments surrounding any missile defense system. Naval NMD offers an extremely cost-effective solution. American taxpayers have already invested \$50 billion in the Aegis ships that are deployed around the world.²⁸⁵ Upgrading the Aegis system to be NMD capable would cost only \$3-6 billion compared to at least \$30 billion for other proposed NMD systems.²⁸⁶ Navy Upper Tier also offers the longest range (more than a thousand miles) and highest velocity interceptors of any system currently under development. A forward deployed missile defense would be highly capable of intercepting missiles in the ascent phase over enemy territory or international waters, long before they could approach the continental United States.²⁸⁷

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Henry F. Cooper, "To Build an Affordable Shield," *Orbis* 40 no. 1 (Winter 1996): 96.

²⁸⁴ Walman, "NMD and The Navy's Potential Solution," 27-28.

²⁸⁵ Henry F. Cooper, "To Build an Affordable Shield," 96.

²⁸⁶ Walman, "National Missile Defense and The Navy's Potential Solution," 34.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 33.

D. AREAS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

This thesis outlines the domestic political considerations surrounding missile defense and suggested implications for *National Missile Defense From the Sea*. Focusing on how key individuals manipulate powerful images to legitimize and popularize their beliefs is key to understanding and reacting to shifts in congressional attitudes toward missile defense. However, even if myth makers interpret images and events to foster a domestic political climate that favors withdrawing from the ABM Treaty and deploying robust national missile defenses, there will be a number of obstacles to a sea-based option that require additional study. Institutional, operational, and programmatic barriers need close examination.

Exploiting the inherent political advantages of *NMD From the Sea* will require broad institutional support for a new naval mission. Current Navy support for TMBD programs is shallow at best. One high placed naval officer explained that if the Navy embraces the missile defense mission "we will lose those ships to STRATCOM."²⁸⁸ Unless broader institutional support for Navy missile defense can be fostered, the Navy may be incapable of presenting a coherent NMD proposal when the opportunity arises. Therefore, studying the roots of the Navy institutional attitudes toward missile defense is an area ripe for further study.

The Navy must also contemplate new operational concepts to accommodate a Naval NMD capability. Pursuing Naval NMD could diminish the Navy's ability to remain forward deployed. In the midst of a serious missile threat, Congress and the public is likely to demand any missile defense be used to defend America first. This new requirement could leave the

²⁸⁸ Interview with a highly placed officer on the Navy Staff, 9 September 1997.

country with insufficient naval surface forces to protect its forward deployed Carrier Battle and Amphibious Ready Groups. The substantial range of the Navy Upper Tier capability, more than a thousand miles, can help mitigate these concerns. To better understand these issues a detailed assessment of NMD operational factors is required.

The Navy must also carefully contemplate its missile defense development and acquisition strategy. While the relationship between elites, myths, and powerful images can help explain shifts in congressional funding, it cannot explain the lack of missile defenses to defend American cities. Several times missile defense advocates have secured substantial political support and funding to develop a missile defense capability. Yet the United States remains incapable of defending its cities from foreign missile attacks. Successful myth making can prove futile in the absence of a technological system builder who has the singular determination to overcome formidable technical hurdles, focus the program on clearly definable goals, demand results, cultivate alliances, and manage critical resources.²⁸⁹

SDI, for example, took an academic approach to the missile defense problem, spreading resources to thin and failing to concentrate resources on clearly definable goals. In contrast, a successful Naval NMD must be patterned after Admiral Rickover's nuclear power or Admiral Raborn's submarine-launched ballistic missile program. A study of these successful naval innovations would be instructive and might help the assure the success of a Naval NMD program.

²⁸⁹ For a discussion of the importance of technological system builders see Peter R. Lavoy, *Learning to Live with the Bomb?*, 100-102.

E. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Framing Congressional Attitudes

This study has demonstrated that congressional defense policy making cannot be understood by simply examining the incentives and motivations underlying a series of floor votes on various defense issues. While it is true that Congress members support initiatives that they perceive to be a combination of sound policy and good politics, voting decisions are not made in a vacuum. Framing—or myth making—places political incentives in context and shapes congressional perceptions of what constitutes sound policy. Elites use a variety of techniques to attract media coverage, interpret events and images, define the terms of the debate, and foster a favorable climate of opinion surrounding their desired policy option. Congress members, in turn, simultaneously take cues from the public and political leaders that influence their attitudes and subsequent voting behavior. Understanding the relationship between political elites, strategic beliefs, and popular images in shaping congressional attitudes is not intended to replace deferential, parochial, or policy lenses; instead, it explains the process that links these factors to congressional decision-making.

Missile defense controversies have become a perennial characteristic of American strategic discourse. This study examined the role of the framing process in four divisive congressional debates over missile defense to draw implications for the Navy's role in the ongoing NMD debate. Underlying each debate studied were deeply held convictions about how deploying missile defenses might affect American security. Lacking concrete evidence, key players consistently manipulated powerful images to perpetuate their strategic arguments. During "The Great ABM Debate" of the 1960s, elites successfully manipulated the image

of a mushroom cloud exploding over America's backyards to create intense public resistance to the Sentinel ABM system. Ten years later, President Reagan's crusade against the "evil empire" combined with horrific descriptions of a nuclear holocaust gave political life to the nuclear freeze movement and reinforced the desire for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). More recently, images of the Patriot missile during Gulf War became the fulcrum for manipulating public and congressional attitudes toward missile defenses.

Each of these cases illustrated that success or failure of any missile defense effort depends largely upon the ability of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize their arguments in favor of missile defenses. Today, elite opinion concerning the strategic utility of missile defenses is still polarized. A balance of myths remains. However, key players stand ready to seize the next powerful image to reinforce their strategic arguments and tilt the political balance in favor of their desired missile defense policies.

2. Advocating Aegis: The Way Ahead!

Prematurely pursuing an NMD capability could undermine support for the Aegis program. Continued public apathy on defense issues might allow the President to undermine NMD initiatives with political impunity, regardless of congressional support. Maintaining the shallow political consensus that is currently driving Navy missile defense programs will require the Navy to walk a political tightrope between disparate political factions. Success might ultimately rest on the cautious pursuit of ABM "treaty compliant" Navy theater systems while making closely-held preparations to upgrade those systems to defend

American cities should a culmination of events, popular images, and political beliefs compel political leaders to demand such a capability.

Studies are needed to examine the institutional, operational, and programmatic factors that would underlie a Navy NMD effort. Success of Naval NMD will depend upon the infrastructure underlying the Navy theater missile defense program. The Navy must identify a clear path to overcoming institutional, financial, and technological hurdles to Naval NMD. The right people must be positioned to establish clearly definable goals, demand that milestones are reached on time, and ensure that resources are managed properly. Institutional support inside the Navy must be cultivated and the operational implications of this new naval mission must be fully explored.

The importance of naval images should not be underestimated. Success or failure of a Naval NMD program is likely to depend largely upon the ability of key individuals to create or interpret events and images to legitimize and popularize their arguments in favor of the Navy's programs. Two sets of images are important. To embrace the Naval NMD solution, the public and elites to must first imagine the seriousness of missile problem. Events—such as an Iranian nuclear test, a missile attack on America or our allies, or widespread publicity of Russian command and control problems—might create an opportunity for missile defense advocates to foster a national consensus favoring withdrawal from the ABM treaty and immediate deployment of an NMD capability.

When the nation calls, the Navy could be poised to offer a quick, cost-effective, and culturally consistent, NMD solution. Disseminating images of surface combatants conducting theater missile defense demonstrations and exercises could pave the way for public support of Naval NMD. Properly presented, the *NMD From the Sea* concept could help alleviate public fears of foreign missiles by establishing a forward defense of the homeland while serving America's mission to provide an extended defense that promotes world stability. Naval NMD is a natural defense of the United States. Just as Aegis was the mythological shield that protected Zeus from deadly threats, when the missile threat becomes apparent to the American people—the image of Aegis ships standing in harm's way to shield American cities may be an important factor in shaping future congressional attitudes toward missile defense.

APPENDIX

STRATEGIC MYTHS CONCERNING MISSILE DEFENSE

Congressional attitudes toward missile defense reflect the strategic myths—the unverified beliefs about the relationship between weapons of mass destruction, missile defenses, and security—that surround the missile defenses debate. Although attitudes towards missile defense encompass a wide spectrum of ideas, their proponents can be grouped into three categories: Hawks, Doves, and Owls.¹ Strategic *Hawks* are individuals who believe that missile defenses increase security by reducing the vulnerability of both the strategic arsenal and the American public. Strategic *Doves* are people who believe that deployment of strategic defenses is destabilizing and would unnecessarily escalate the nuclear arms race bringing the nation closer to the brink of nuclear war. Strategic *Owls*, or moderates, are individuals who only favor missile defense for limited protection or in an overall deterrent-stabilizing context.

A. THE CULT OF SUPERIORITY

Strategic Hawks' beliefs are rooted in the experiences of World War Two. To them, appeasement failed when Western policies exploded after the Munich conference of 1938. Chamberlain's pronouncement "that there would be peace in our time" proved disastrous.²

¹ These descriptions are adaptation of the categories described by Graham T. Allison, Albert Carnesale, and Joseph Nye, Jr., *Hawks, Doves, and Owls* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

² Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press., 1976), 59.

The Hawk's position can be summarized by the popular Roman adage: "he who wants peace, must prepare for war."

The Reagan administration's early defense policy initiatives reflected a pure manifestation of the belief in "peace through strength." In his autobiography, former President Ronald Reagan, the vicar of conservative strategic values, explained that the impetus behind the massive military buildup of the early 1980's was to "assure that we would regain and sustain military *superiority* over the Soviet Union."³ Seeking strategic superiority is the best policy to deter nuclear aggression and to limit nuclear damage while avoiding the "surrender of freedom should deterrence fail."⁴ Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger articulated this position when he openly talked about the need to prevail in a nuclear confrontation:

Should deterrence fail and strategic nuclear war with the USSR occur, the United States must prevail. You show me a secretary of Defense who is planning not to prevail and I'll show you a Secretary of Defense that ought to be impeached.⁵

In essence, missile defenses reduce a state's vulnerability to attack and enhance a state's ability to prevail in a nuclear war.

If "peace through strength" describes the impetus for the Hawk's quest for superiority, then their enmity for the doctrine of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) provides the other key to understanding their support for missile defenses. On the one hand,

³ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 294.

⁴ Albert Wohlstetter, "Between an Unfree World and None: Increasing Our Choices," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1985), 991.

⁵ Quoted in Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 406.

they seek to maintain superiority to bolster deterrence and to insure victory if deterrence fails. On the other hand, they believe that the concept of mutually assured destruction, which requires that you hold your enemy's population hostage to nuclear attack, is morally bankrupt. In calling for the Strategic Defense Initiative, President Reagan asked:

Wouldn't it be better to save lives than avenge them?; and what if people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter Soviet attack, that we could destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?⁶

Consequently, missile defenses' perceived ability to assure strategic superiority while helping escape mutually assured destruction have made them a cornerstone of the Hawk's theology.

B. THE COCOON OF STABILITY

Strategic moderates—or *Owls*—generally favor hedging against strategic uncertainty. Therefore, they simultaneously favor arms control, limited missile defenses, and strategic modernization. At the core of their beliefs is the idea that none of these policies can alter the condition of mutual vulnerability. In the paradoxical logic of mutual nuclear deterrence, strategic stability reflects the conviction that the safety of each superpower depends on the vulnerability of both.⁷ Mutual vulnerability assures that neither side will attack the other for fear of devastating retaliation. To Owls, mutually assured destruction is not an immoral policy but rather a “grim fact of life.”⁸

⁶ Ronald W. Reagan, transcript of 23 March 1983 speech, in “President Speech on Military Spending and a New Defense,” *New York Times*, 24 March 1983, A-20.

⁷ Pat Towell, “Breakthrough Senate SDI Pact Presages Conference Fight,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review*, 3 August 1991, 2181; Freedman, 407-408.

⁸ Robert S. McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 34-130.

Moderates doubt that a nuclear arms race would actually increase the likelihood of nuclear war. But since increasing the size of our nuclear arsenal cannot obviate the reality of mutually assured destruction, massive nuclear build ups are undesirable because they produce the same end state at higher cost to the American taxpayer.

Preserving the quantity and quality of nuclear forces, however, is key to avoiding a first strike during a crisis. This concern was forcefully articulated by ten leading Owls in a 1986 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

Decision-makers would be under great pressure during a crisis. There would be a strong incentive to fire off nuclear weapons before they could be destroyed on their launchers.⁹

Strategic modernization and arms control, taken together, provide the best mechanism to prevent a first strike by ensuring that the strategic deterrent as a whole is amply survivable and by reassuring our adversaries that a nuclear attack is unlikely.

Owls endorsed the 1972 ABM treaty which codified the concept of strategic stability by prohibiting the deployment of widespread national missile defenses. However, their concerns about the possibility of an accidental launch or a limited strike often cause them to support the development of ABM "treaty compliant" limited missile defense systems. In addition, they generally are willing to entertain arguments that place missile defenses in the overall deterrence-stabilizing context. Thus, moderates have proven to be the brokers of any strategic debate and are therefore the object of strategic myth making by both Hawks and

⁹ McGeorge Bundy, Morton H. Halperin, William F. Kaufmann, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, Madelene O'Donnell, Leon V. Segal, Gerard C. Smith, Richard H. Ulman, and Paul C. Warnke, "Back from the Brink," *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1996): 36.

Doves. But the Owl's unverified strategic beliefs are no less intensely held than those of other political actors. They can be equally savvy about manipulating images to reinforce their beliefs in attempts to foster support for their initiatives.

C. THE ORDER OF NUCLEAR ELIMINATION

The Strategic Doves' opposition to missile defenses traces back to the spiral model of international relations; the idea that arms races are fueled by fear and mutual and that a spiral of tension leads to massive arms buildup and eventual war.¹⁰ Conversely, if one side unilaterally disarms or at least ceases weapons production, the spiral of tension would be halted and the risk of war would be reduced. To prevent the spiral of nuclear tension from escalating into nuclear war, Doves have advocate establishing strategic stability—a stable balance of mutual fear and distrust—only as a first step toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Doves believe that mutual vulnerability can only be alleviated through severe arms reductions ultimately leading to complete nuclear disarmament. They believe that the existence of nuclear weapons is a clear and present danger to human existence that far exceeds any political purpose.¹¹ Therefore, Doves argue that “we can never taste real peace again until we find a means to eliminate nuclear weapons altogether.”¹²

¹⁰ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperceptions in International Politics*, 62.

¹¹ This argument is forcefully articulated by Jonathon Schell, *The Abolition* (New York: Avon Books, 1984), 27.

¹² Richard Falk, a persistent peace activist, quoted in Adam Garfinkle, *The Politics of the Nuclear Freeze* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1984), 5.

Doves believe that deploying missile defenses would start a nuclear arms race and increase pressures for a preemptive first strike. Deploying missile defenses to seek superiority or to lower nuclear vulnerability would be counterproductive, provocative, and destabilizing.¹³ At best, missile defenses would act as an impediment to negotiating reductions in strategic arsenals. Peter Zimmerman, former advisor to the International Security and Arms Control Agency explains the Dove's argument:

Why should we trash an agreement that would remove 8,000 warheads pointed at us so that we can defend against countries without any capability of reaching us with a nuclear missile. As far as I know, any Russian warhead we get chopped up and destroyed is one that we have defended against perfectly.¹⁴

Doves believe that disarmament through arms control will best increase America's security. In their minds, missile defenses serve as catalyst for the arms race, undermine stability, and send the nuclear clock spiraling toward midnight.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kenneth J. Garcia, "Star Wars Making a Comeback Conservatives Push to revive space-based defense system," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 December, 1995, A1.

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